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American Dramatists Series

The Judge

Louis J. Block

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THE JUDGE



American Dramatists Series

THE JUDGE

A Play in Four Acts

LOUIS JAMES BLOCK



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THE JUDGE



PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

Baron Von Sendlingen, The Judge.

Minister of Justice.

George Berger, Von Sendlingen's Friend.

Von Werner, A Judge.

Dernegg, Public Prosecutor.

Count Henry Riesner.

John Novyrok, A Workman.

Dr. Rohn.

Franz, An Old Servant.

Victorine Lippert.

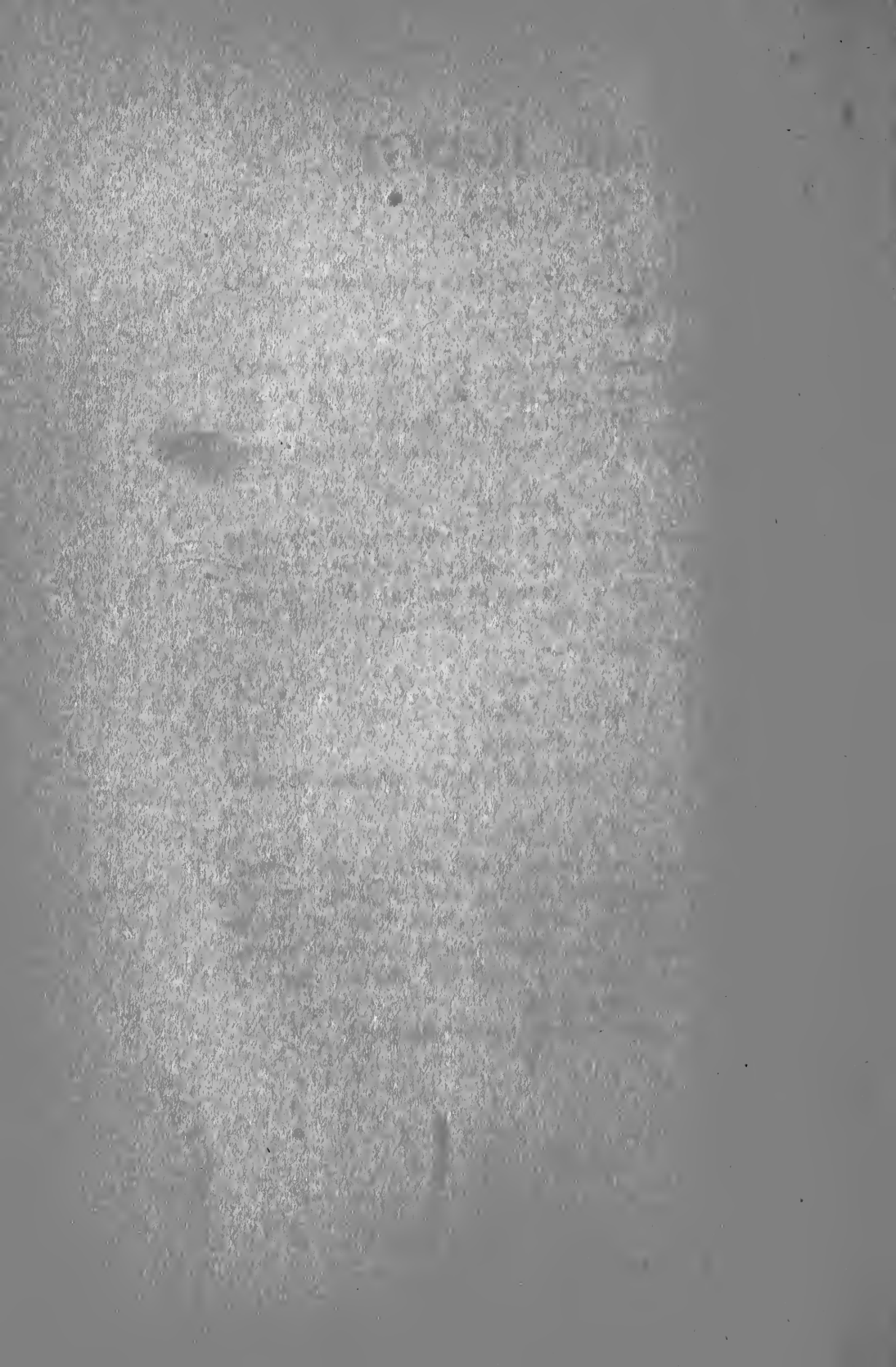
Countess Riesner, Mother of Count Henry.

Brigitta, Von Sendlingen's Housekeeper.

Marianna Brandes, Companion of the Countess.

Workmen. Guards.

SCENE.—*A manufacturing Town in Northeastern Austria. Time, November, 1852, to March, 1853.*



THE JUDGE

ACT I

SCENE.—*The library of Von Sendlingen. Brigitta and Franz.*

Franz

So—that business is over. The noise of the working men will now come to a stop. There is no one in whom they believe as in the Baron, and he will have some word for them of gladness and good cheer.

Brigitta

I am afraid that even he will have much difficulty in pacifying the men, so enraged are they, and so filled with a sense of wrong at the hardships heaped upon them. Besides there is that other terrible business awaiting him.

Franz

You mean Victorine Lippert?

Brigitta

Yes. It is the sort of thing he dislikes to deal with.

Franz

Poor child—so young—and such a fate! Nowadays everything goes wrong, the children are all brought up wrong, and we must hear of these dreadful things! The whole world is upside down, and the workingman is ready to declare himself emperor. Ah! A knock!

(Goes out and returns with Berger.)

Berger

Good morning, Brigitta. Is it not time that your master has arrived? The train is somewhat late, I believe.

Brigitta

Perhaps he has been detained on the way. He has many little confidences with people all over the town and one of them may be keeping him.

Berger

Doubtless that is the case. I will just sit down and remain until he comes.

Brigitta

You will excuse me, Mr. Berger; I have the usual morning duties to look after. (*Passes out.*)

Berger

(*As if to himself.*) I must see him about that unhappy woman, who has aroused every feeling of pity in me.

Franz

Is it the Lippert woman that you are speaking of, sir?

Berger

Yes—poor child. I wish that it were anyone else than Von Werner who is to preside at the examination. Justice has never worn a stranger face than in him. He firmly believes that the right can be put down on paper in words and sentences, and indeed that it has already been done beyond change or cavil. A law, you know, dear Franz, is a law, though a very foolish set of men very foolishly may have made it, and a folly once securely set forth in black and white can never, never, be altered for the better.

Franz

You are very good, Mr. Berger, to talk in this way to an ignorant man like me, but I haven't, thank God, lived so long under the shadow of justice without learning something. Besides we poor folks are often ground down by hard times and griefs, and we are glad to see any way out of troubles and learn to forgive where men who have never felt the shoe pinch think it is best to be strict—strict—very strict.

Berger

It's not always an easy thing to decide. Sometimes it seems that justice were better served by holding the reins less tight. How long it is since Von Sendlingen has been away! Ah, good friend, I grudge every hour that he is not here, and we need him all the time—that pedant, Von Werner—you are not listening to what I am saying, Franz?

Franz

I forget a good deal. I am getting along in years, and my memory is not what it was when you, a young man just beginning your work as a lawyer, found me already an old servant in this house. That knocker has been going all the morning! (*Passes out and then returns with Von Werner and Dernegg. The former places a package of documents on the table. Franz leaves the room. The gentlemen exchange greetings. Von Werner is dressed with extreme precision and is pompous and affected in his manners.*)

Berger

We shall be the first to welcome the Judge on his return, excepting those who appear to have claimed

his thoughts before ourselves.

Von Werner

You have not been informed of the happy circumstances which import so much both to Baron Von Sendlingen and myself? I shall receive my due recognition. I have been second altogether too long. I now appear in my true light. I am the Master here.

Berger

You have, indeed, the advantage of me.

Von Werner

In consequence of the fortunate termination of the labor difficulties brought about by the exertions of myself with some assistance from our friend, and the important services which I have rendered the ministry in the matter of needed law reforms, Von Sendlingen receives preferment which I do not grudge him. He will take a position as a Superior Judge, and the minister gives me the place which has long been mine as his successor. The news has not yet been made public, the more's the pity, but it will be at once on the return of the Baron. (*He gives a low and peculiar chuckle, rises and rubs his hands together and walks haughtily up and down the room.*)

Dernegg

My congratulations you have already received; they are tempered only by my sense of loss in the departure of Von Sendlingen, but I hope you found them profound enough for your acceptance.

Berger

(*Stiffly, with ill-concealed scorn.*) The interests of our city have always been an affair of serious

consideration with the ministry of justice, and they have recognized the fact that rigorous uprightness and wide acquaintance with our difficult situation were imperatively required. You are a learned, very learned man.

Von Werner

I shall hardly walk in the footsteps of my predecessor. I see above and beyond him. I shall make the necessary changes called for by a higher intelligence. With the proletariat that seethes in this manufacturing town so viciously, and sometimes shows its teeth snarlingly at constituted authority, I shall be firm, startlingly firm. What we need nowadays is reason, pure, unflinching reason, which I know I possess. (*Chuckles and rubs his hands as above, takes a few strides, then looks down on the gentlemen with a broad and blatant smile.*)

Berger

The weak and suffering will no doubt find at your hands that consideration which they so shamefully crave.

Dernegg

Shamefully? Quite right. (*Laughs lightly.*)

Von Werner

Right, indeed. (*Stares and smiles.*) Shamefully is just the word.

(*They turn at a noise behind them and see Franz shaking hands with Von Sendlingen, who is quite overjoyed to be at home again.*)

Franz

There you are! How it gladdens my old heart! What a dull time we have had without you! Every day we have looked over as many papers as we

could get, to see if your name was in any one of them and to find out what you were doing! And when your letters came, how we read them over and over, and you were so good as to write us often. We have saved them up! Now I must go and tell Brigitta!

Von Sendlingen

Not just yet, my dear Franz. In a little while. Let me see my good friends here first. So-so! (*Shakes with both hands and Franz goes out.*) Berger,—George,—I have a good deal to tell you. It is a pleasure to see you, Mr. Dernegg, and my honorable intelligent successor. I am afraid, however, that I am hardly ready to go. I have become wedded to my labors here and I may ask the government to exchange the appointment and let you take the higher one. (*Von Werner smiles and chuckles and rubs his hands.*) But be seated. Are there any special matters you wish to bring to me requiring consideration?

(*He removes his overcoat and they all gather around the table.*)

Von Werner

All reports are ready for your inspection. The reading should begin at once. We have brought them for that purpose. I never delay. I am prompt to the minute. We must always work. (*He points to the documents on the table; Von Sendlingen takes them up and begins looking at them.*)

Berger

(*With some asperity.*) It is not so immediate. I pray you pardon me, but let us have a few minutes' conversation. It has been many weeks since

we have had the privilege of hearing the Baron's voice.

Von Werner

There is one case that calls for instant action, which I would give it. (*Pauses and arranges his hair.*) The preliminary hearing is set for the day after tomorrow, and I, as usual, intended to take upon myself the presiding over it. You no doubt will, as usual, agree with me.

Derneegg

You refer to that fearful case of the young woman murdering her newborn child. Unhappy, half-crazed creature!

Von Werner

As no one cared to defend her, I gave that duty to Mr. Berger. You will approve of him. (*With condescension.*)

Von Sendlingen

Yes, indeed. The murder of her own child, you say? The circumstances leading to such an act must be terrible, indeed.

Von Werner

The record is here, Baron, ready as usual. (*Wide smile. Von Sendlingen takes the paper handed to him, holds it unopened and seems to be losing himself in thought.*)

Von Werner

(*Continues.*) The crime has grown singularly frequent of late owing to the laxity of Judges. (*Bridles and plays with cravat.*) One surely must expect such fearful exemplifications of the madness which has come upon mankind, the lower mankind, of course. The revolutionary sentiment spread

broadcast through books, written by persons without insight and therefore wholly destitute of scientific worth, and repeated in the shameless public prints without such restrictions as I would place, have weakened all bonds. The family is no longer considered, and the state itself is in danger. Such are my *matured* sentiments.

Von Sendlingen

You appear to have reason on your side.

Berger

There are always alleviating circumstances, and the law must not offend by becoming too legal.

Dernegg

You assuredly are the right lawyer for this woman. It must be admitted, however, that the best intents of justice are frequently served by leaning towards the side of mercy.

Von Werner

Yet within a comparatively brief period the number of crimes of this very sort has doubled. Even I have been lenient; I can point to no instance of the capital penalty for this most heinous crime in the past dozen years. (*Coughs and walks about.*)

Von Sendlingen

There will be an early change in that respect. The Minister of Justice holds to your opinion, and he will recommend a more stringent enforcement of the law. An unfortunate decision in my opinion. The roots of this social disease strike deeper than we deem and are not to be extirpated by the severest of punishments. In the disturbed condition of the times, the dark uncertainties hovering over so many, in the harshness belonging to all transition, violent

or half-suppressed, lies the origin of this increase of crime. The strong hand of the executive is not so much required as the schoolmaster and the sincere upholder of religion.

Von Werner

(*With owlsh solemnity.*) The circumstances in the present case are of the most repellant character, and we can be of service to the general weal by beginning the salutary punishment of the crime here. (*Stares.*)

Dernegg

The affair has not been probed to the bottom. The most important witness in this case is far from unassailable.

Berger

The woman is struck dumb by the fate which has overtaken her. She is buried in a kind of stupor from which nothing arouses her. She refuses all defense, and I shall act in her behalf entirely against her will. I fully believe, however, that we are far from a sufficient understanding of the case.

Von Sendlingen

My confidence in you, Von Werner, in the clearness of your understanding, in your goodness, is complete. At the same time, due regard must be had to all aspects of the affair.

(*His face is thoughtful and serene as he opens the document in his hand. He reads over the brief writing there, once, twice, three times. Then he gives forth a dull, hoarse, choking cry, an utterance of deadly fear. His face whitens visibly, his features assume a look of horror, the eyes stare with a meaningless intensity on the paper.*)

Von Werner

Great God! Are you ill? Do you know this creature, this infamous murderess?

Berger

Victor—my dear friend—water there—help.

Von Sendlingen

It is nothing—pardon me—you know that with increasing years my heart trouble has grown decidedly worse. The life in Vienna, too, during these past weeks, so different from the quiet regularity to which I am accustomed, has been far from good for me. I am no longer what I was. It will not last many years now—perhaps it will only be a few months or days—ha! ha! I have kept it as still as I could.

Von Werner

That is so, indeed. I have been surprised at your vigor, so unusual in my experience. Shall we not send for your physician? (*With exaggerated solicitude.*)

Berger

Yes, Victor, let me go at once. This business is not pressing; it can be postponed.

Von Sendlingen

The examination is set for the day after tomorrow; it can be held here in my room; and yet—(*He breaks off as if he were conscious that he is making revelations which it were best to leave unsaid. Then he proceeds.*) I must, indeed, ask the privilege of deferring the looking over of these papers for a half-hour, or say an hour. By that time I shall be thoroughly restored. Good morning, for the present, my friends. George, you will

remain with me.

Von Werner

(*To Dernegg as they are leaving.*) His behavior is very strange. (*Coughs.*) We surely cannot attribute the attack to anything in these dull reports. Heart disease has its freaks and whimsicalities, so to speak, quite unforeseeable, quite unaccountable. (*Looks back with a sort of sympathetic grimace.*)

Von Sendlingen

Death, death, and at my hands! Can I let it reach that conclusion? Her blood will cry out against me and my sin! Yet what am I to do? Is any help possible? (*He reads from the paper.*) "Victorine Lippert, Born 25 Jan. 1834, at Rauditz. Governess. Murder of her child, Examination Nov. 8, 1852. God, God have pity upon me!"

Berger

Victor, what is the meaning of all this? What have you to do with the wretched governess of the Countess Riesner? You are beside yourself. Let me ring for Franz. I will go for the good old Doctor and return as soon as I can. Or tell me all about it. Perhaps that will give you peace. The time is short and Von Werner will be punctual, as usual.

(*Von Sendlingen caresses him and makes a few inarticulate efforts to speak, then buries his face in his hands on the table before him. His body quivers with emotion.*)

Von Sendlingen

(*After some time.*) George, George, I shall tell you what makes me the most miserable man

in the world,—it is a strange and sad story. (*He raises his head and makes a strong effort at mastery.*)

Berger

Speak briefly and rapidly. I am this woman's counsellor, and I will help her and you to what extent I can.

(*Von Sendlingen rises from his chair, paces up and down the room, and mutters half to himself as if absorbed in some dark and agonizing recollection.*)

Von Sendlingen

The fate we build up around us by our own action raises its little wall so slowly and gradually that we do not see this at all in the beginning; higher and higher the barricade becomes, and finally we are imprisoned, and the sky shows only as a narrow strip of blue over our heads. I felt secure in these latter years; life had been so gentle and benign, I had hoped by good deeds manifold to have expiated and earned my peace, but it is vain to expect absolution except by the definite undoing of the wrong in which we have become entangled. Now this horrible return of my deed, so far away, so long ago! If I could bear it alone! If the suffering came but to me! Why should another soul, another heart, whose right to all innocence and happiness is incontestable, be forced to endure the woe and shame, and all through me, through me, most helpless and guilty of men. What can I do? Whither can I turn?

Berger

(*Greatly agitated.*) Victor, master yourself, for my sake, for your own sake, be calm, let me call

for Franz, you are not now in a condition to tell me anything. You no doubt overestimate the difficulties of your position as we all do when trouble overtakes us. When you have had time to collect yourself, you will be better able to talk the matter over, and consider what most needs to be done.

Von Sendlingen

(Breathing heavily and pausing before Berger.)
What is that case of the embezzling cashier of the manufacturing establishment, the largest in the city? Has he been dealt with?

Berger

(With an expression of amazement.) His mind is giving way. No, he is out on bail. Moreover, his sister, a very wealthy woman, has made good the entire loss, and there has been no interruption of business on his account. Von Werner, however, talks of the majesty of the law and its due vindication.

Von Sendlingen

Von Werner—Von Werner—he glares back at me everywhere. It ought to be as you say. The man has been amply punished by his loss of position and the pain he has endured. But Victorine Lippert! Von Werner must preside at her examination and trial, and he has already expressed his judgment upon her. I have myself put the strongest weapon into his hands by telling him what the Minister of Justice thinks of such offenses. It is another way in which Fate is winding its coils about me. Had I only known! No, she must be saved in some way! I must preside at that exam-

ination and trial. I cannot trust to that correct and righteous man. She must be saved, George, she must be saved!

Berger

In the name of all that is reasonable, be seated, Victor. I have already been so stirred to pity by the plight in which Victorine Lippert finds herself that I had made up my mind to leave no stone unturned to secure for her the lightest of sentences. Now comes your unaccountable interest in her to provoke me to intenser activity.

Von Sendlingen

(*Seating himself and muttering.*) Can I tell any one? Yet it must be. What will become of me? What will become of her?

Berger

(*Firmly.*) I can see no use in carrying this hesitation further. I do not see that I can do anything for you. (*Rises as if to go.*)

Von Sendlingen

(*Agitatedly.*) No—No—No—You must stay, you must stay.

Berger

Who then is this Victorine Lippert?

Von Sendlingen

Heaven have mercy upon me, George, she is my own child, she is my daughter!

Berger

Your daughter! Impossible! You are deceiving yourself! Yet take courage! Poor child!

Von Sendlingen

(*Seating himself and with much effort.*) No, George, my best and only friend and helper, I can-

not mistake, the name, the place, the date, all prove to me the folly of doubting in the least. Would that I might throw off the conviction that deepens and darkens over me with increasing strength and sinister effect. I would leap at the chance which left it open to me to think that I am in error, but I have no time to delude myself. You will show me the way out of this fate, you will find some means of escape both for her and for me.

Berger

Whatever can be done, I will do. There are many expedients, right and honorable, which you know as well as I, and not one shall be left untried.

Von Sendlingen

The story of my life must come first. You must judge me as you deem best. Only for God's sake do not abandon me, do not let me fight this battle single-handed.

Berger

Tell me not a word. The past is your own; out of it has come to me the friendship which has lifted me to what I know of the highest. I need not inquire into any antecedents; I am at your side to add what strength I have to yours. I know that you are troubled, and I can be of service. Still I feel strongly that you must be mistaken. You can have nothing to do with this Victorine—Victor,—Victor—I am lost and bewildered!

Von Sendlingen

Yes, everything concurs. Here then in brief are the facts. It is another of those unhappy experiences which belong to so many youths and early manhoods, and which we think inevitable adjuncts

of our civilization. So little knowledge have we gained of the significance of youthful passions, and so little have we accomplished for their due development and purification. You know what a family I belong to. We date our ancestry back to the time when Caesar crossed the Rhine to enter into indecisive conflict with Ariovistus and his Germans; indeed we mention the barbarians who were honored in founding so great a house. It is a long line of heroes and counsellors. As if a man's soul antedated the period of his awakening into a consciousness of himself, as if he had been before he really learned to live and think. My father made a mesalliance; he was forced to marry my mother by the proud recititude of my grandfather, but he was exiled to an obscure and wretched estate of the family's, to eat out his heart in despair and solitude. My parents had supposed that they loved each other; never was there a more terrible mistake. I grew up in an atmosphere of hate and fear and appalling suffering. (*He pauses as if overcome with emotion.*)

Berger

Do not torture yourself by lingering over details. Tell me just enough to make me intelligent in my labors for you in the present emergency.

Von Sendlingen

My father, before his death, made me take a solemn vow that I would never ally myself to a woman whose rank was less than my own. He would save me from the agony which had overtaken him. After his decease—my mother had died somewhat earlier—my relatives flocked around me, welcomed me as the legitimate bearer of a great name, and

set me with everything in my favor on the path of my career. I chose the law, made rapid progress, and notwithstanding my youth was appointed Judge in a town in Hungary.

Berger

What an abominable place for an inexperienced jurist!

Von Sendlingen

You can really have no conception of the situation. The town was a mass of ruins, inhabited by a population degraded and brutalized. The nobility were, save for their barbaric love of splendor, worse than the people. They spent their lives in the vainest and most sordid of pleasures, and drew their revenues largely from persistent smuggling and systematized robbery. I held myself aloof as long as I could, and excused myself because of the great pressure of work devolving upon me.

Berger

A very temporary retirement, I can readily see.

Von Sendlingen

I delayed the plunge to the uttermost, but was at length obliged to accept the invitations of one Mirescul, the most unscrupulous and daring scoundrel of the whole villainous nobility. What a travesty that word is as applied to them! It was at his house that I met her—Hermina Lippert, the gentlest, tenderest, sweetest of women, the mother of Victorine, the mother of my child.

(He places both his hands upon his heart and trembles violently. Berger stands over him in great alarm. He proceeds.) She was a governess in the family. Why prolong the tale? We loved madly

from the first; such vehemence comes to man or woman but once in a lifetime. The Miresculs threw us together and gave us every opportunity. When a guest in the house, I was given the room adjoining hers. The catastrophe came all too soon. We were married secretly. Mirescul was brought before me, charged with smuggling. He begged to see me alone. He threatened ruin to her and to me if I did not take measures to secure his release. I was swept off my feet, I was overwhelmed.

Berger

You entered the thick of the conflict very early.

Von Sendlingen

I allowed Mirescul to go on his own recognition. What was I to do? My duty as Judge, my oath to my father, my place as the representative of an old family, my love for the woman who had given up all for me, aroused a storm which was shattering my whole being. I received a note from her. She had been grossly affronted by Mirescul, who had sought to wring from her a promise to exert herself with me in his behalf, and she had fled from the house. She was awaiting me. I went to her immediately and tried by all means in my power to reassure her.

Berger

How did it come about that you left her? Oh, forgive that question.

Von Sendlingen

Ask me for no explanations. I was young and beset with frightful complications. My release of Mirescul had enabled that miscreant to tamper with the smuggled goods, and successfully prevent his

conviction for the crimes which he had so long perpetrated with impunity. I found myself accused of complicity in his defeat of justice, and gross failure in official duty.

Berger

What a perdicament!

Von Sendlingen

My relatives came at once to my side; they were stern and imperative; they had but little to say about the error of my ways and the folly of my actions. They engaged to deliver me from the disasters which were hanging over me, but they gave me plainly to understand that life with Hermina was impossible. My father's misfortunes were not left without sufficient and gloomy allusion. I cannot look back upon that time, I cannot account for my conduct, I cannot defend it. I allowed myself to be rescued; I never saw Hermina again. I wrote to her and offered her honorable maintenance; she refused, and disappeared. And I never knew that I had a child until I saw her name and birthplace on this paper today.

Berger

A knock! You cannot see anyone now.

Franz

(*Enters.*) Count Riesner very earnestly begs to see you.

Von Sendlingen

Count Riesner? What can he want here today? Riesner of all men in the world! He, the betrayer of my—my—

Berger

Victor! You forget that we are not alone.

Franz

I knew that there was something going on. He needs me to look after him. I will tell Brigitta. What answer am I to make to the Count?

Berger

On second thought I advise you to admit him. Not a chance is to be lost!

Von Sendlingen

I cannot. It is he who has brought all this shame upon me. Yet what right have I to say a single word against him. Am I not as guilty as he?—Tell the Count that I will see him at once.

Franz

Guilty! You are very strangely altered. You are ill; let me tell the Count to come some other time. You could not have slept well last night and these early breakfasts were never good for you.

Von Sendlingen

Go at once, and do not keep the Count waiting any longer.

Franz

He never talked to me in that way before. I shall go for the Doctor at once. At his time of life it is bad staying at hotels in large towns and being so irregular. What can be the matter anyhow? (*Passes out.*)

Berger

Bring your strength all together in meeting this young man. He may have weighty disclosures to make. He may have come for some cause far from praiseworthy, and you must needs exercise all your

acumen, and pierce his concealments through and through.

(The count enters.)

Von Sendlingen

(After the usual greetings.) Your presence is not wholly unexpected, Count Riesner, and I admire the candor which you display. I take it for granted that you wish to talk about Victorine Lippert.

Count Henry

That is what I am here for.

Von Sendlingen

My friend, Berger, is her counsel, appointed by the court, and your communications need his ear as well as mine.

Count Henry

I trust that you will pardon me, if I seem agitated, and even incoherent. I have been through so much in these last days, and I have had such difficulty in getting here that I need some time to be calm enough to ask you a few questions. I had, indeed, been sent away to England, but I succeeded in eluding my companions, and I am now doing what I can to prevent—my mother—from finding my abiding place. I would do what lies in me to make reparation to Victorine, whom I love more deeply today than ever before. My mother is inflexible. She is infuriated at the poor girl. I was kept away when the quarrel took place or I should have been at Victorine's side. I would have married her if they had not driven her out of the house. I found it out through an inadvertence of one of my traveling companions, and I made all expedi-

tion I could in returning. What can I do, what can I do?

Von Sendlingen

You say that you are stopping in town?

Count Henry

Not exactly in town, but very near it. My mother as yet knows nothing of my return, but she must find it out soon, this very morning, no doubt, and then the difficulties surrounding me will be much increased.

Von Sendlingen

You would help this woman accused of so dark an offense?

Count Henry

Yes, I appeal to you as I would to a father. You can help her, you can show me what to do. You can be as a father to both of us. I love her with all my heart, and the days were so full of happiness. I cannot allow myself to think what she has endured, it makes me feel as if I should go mad. I will marry her, and we can go far away. She is as innocent of any crime as God himself, who made her to be glad and happy and beautiful.

Berger

These things are not so easily settled as you suppose. We are no longer discussing some trifling misfortune transpiring within the charmed realm which we are pleased to call society. This is an affair in which society, properly so called, is concerned, and the part you are to play is not without serious danger to yourself.

Count Henry

You wrong me, you wrong me greatly by these insinuations. Has she not been placed in jeopardy of her life? Is she not now menaced with the punishment of death? I shall take my place beside her, to suffer with her, to expose my guilt and shame, and with your help to rescue her from the peril that enrings her. Can anything be done?

Von Sendlingen

Are you willing to appear in Court and testify in her behalf?

Count Henry

That is a small matter. I will do anything, everything.

Von Sendlingen

You are willing to make reparation in the way of marriage?

Count Henry

To watch over her, to win her forgiveness, to make her future forget this past, will be the endeavor of my whole life.

Von Sendlingen

Remember what you sacrifice. Can you hope for happiness in such a marriage? It has been tried, and the consequences have been most wretched.

Count Henry

To save her is the only thought that has lodgment in my brain. Till she is safe, I can speak of nothing. What have I to do with my own happiness? Should I never know another minute of gladness, it would not heap upon me half the misery through which she has been dragged; and through no fault that deserved such relentless persecution.

The devotion of a whole life, at whatever cost, is not an equivalent for the agony which has been hers.

Berger

As counsellor for this poor creature, hounded and sore beset, and close to the perilous precipice, where an ignominious death awaits her, I shall accept this unforeseen assistance. I shall come to you and consult with you more fully. You will entrust me with your address? You know where to find me.

Count Henry

(*Writing on a card.*) It is here; but you will be cautious. For the present I must not be seen.

Von Sendlingen

I may see that card?

Count Henry

It is on you chiefly that I rely. (*Berger hands Von Sendlingen the card, and the latter places it at once in a drawer of his desk.*)

Berger

(*To Riesner. Smilingly.*) You can trust me.

Von Sendlingen

You shall redeem yourself and her. Not an expedient known to the law will be left untried. The outlook is dark, but we have some reason to hope for better things.

Count Henry

Thank you both for that. (*Leaves.*)

Berger

(*Coming closer to Von Sendlingen.*) Providence is working for us in unexpected ways. Who could have supposed that a young man like Riesner would act thus? His imperious mother has, it appears, brought into the world a son with a determination

stronger than her own. Fortunately for us his will has taken a direction opposite to hers. We shall certainly be able to avoid—

Von Sendlingen

The death penalty. You can speak plainly. I am prepared for anything. An imprisonment of indefinite duration would not be an alleviation; it would, in truth, be far worse; and then who shall preside at these examinations?—Who shall be her Judge?—and mine!

Berger

Von Werner is an idiot, determined that the very letter of the law be observed. Can not you preside at the preliminary?

Von Sendlingen

The law forbids that a father should preside in any case affecting his family. Think of it, George, put yourself in my place. As Judge I am the mouth-piece of the life that beats in the veins of the nation, and further I must see to it that no injury ensues to that life through any error of mine. All my thought, my hope, my deeds have been given to the service of this high reality ever since maturity claimed me. Now I am called to sit in judgment upon her, my own flesh and blood, whom my eager passion and reckless seizure of delight brought into being, and she now staggers under the weight of the destiny which should be mine. What she endures is what I ought to endure; if she dies, it is I who ought to stand in her place. Innocent girl, caught in the mad whirl of my actions, she bears the blame and the burden, while I am honored of

men, called to a higher post of administering justice, and drinking in with ardent ears the gratulatory speeches of my fellows. I am the doer; she is the expiator! It is horrible!

Berger

In the very views which you are now expressing you are acting as the high-thoughted Judge of the Judge; who so well fitted to think the right and to give it outward potency as yourself? If the law does not explicitly forbid, it is your duty and privilege to take upon yourself this serious task. You can be trusted to be severe enough upon yourself. In you always the stern impersonality of justice has shown its milder aspect of merciful regard for the erring and misguided and hapless, and that mingled strength and tenderness will speak through you the words and decision of the Highest, yes, Victor, of God!

Von Sendlingen

You tempt me sorely, but it must not, cannot be. Find some other path out of the labyrinth, help me, help me!

Brigitta

(*Entering in haste.*) *Von Sendlingen greets her with much feeling.*) I could not stand it a minute more. I waited to have you send for me, and I hoped that all this business would soon be over. Franz said you were far from well. We have longed to see you, and expected to welcome you in our good homely way, and we find that you are ill and troubled and so engaged that you do not want us to come and speak to you.

Von Sendlingen

My good Brigitta, my best thanks are due you and Franz, and I shall be more suited to the old pleasures and quietude in a short while. Only be patient with me a little longer. But Brigitta, I have a word to say to you just now. You have heard of this—this—Victorine Lippert?

Brigitta

My heart went out to her as I saw her entering her cell a short time ago.

Von Sendlingen

That is quite like yourself. I wish you to go to her.—I will see that the necessary permission is granted. You will bring to her the womanly ministrations of which she must be in need. You will be gentle with her, and speak comfort to her, and ease her overburdened soul. For my sake, Brigitta, for my sake!

Brigitta

For your sake?

Von Sendlingen

Yes, I will explain at some other time. You must go to her this very afternoon. Now, Brigitta, I shall have some gentlemen at dinner, and I shall also wish you to take some of the best we have from my own table to the wretched girl yonder.

Brigitta

It shall be done as you wish, but I have a small commission to fulfill. Here is an old bunch of keys which I found in a disused drawer of your desk—we have had a thorough cleaning up in your absence—and I have taken great care of them. They should be put away in a secure place.

THE JUDGE

Von Sendlingen

I have some vague recollection of them. They belonged to my predecessor. I did not attach any importance to them.

Berger

(*Taking the keys.*) Curious lot of old rusty rubbish! I do not believe that any one of them can be of the smallest use.

Brigitta

Yet this insignificant one (*pointing to it distinctly*) opens a door in the wall between the house yard and the prison yard. The door is so constructed, and time has so colored it and the adjacent masonry, that you can find it only with difficulty. Franz and I looked for it, and at last came upon it after a close survey of the whole wall. Franz remembered the fact of this key being the one that fits in the old lock.

Von Sendlingen

That is the key to the door, you say? (*Takes it and scrutinizes it very seriously.*)

Berger

In this old-fashioned, not to say mediaeval, combination of prison and dwelling, no doubt we can find any number of doors and posterns and corridors that no one today suspects of being at all. Queer that we should still allow ourselves to live in a style that has nothing to do with our century. Here are Judge's dwelling, court-rooms, and prisons, all practically under one roof. A hideous arrangement and one which we shall change in due time.

Von Sendlingen

Thank you for your care of the keys, Brigitta. It would not be well if they fell into the wrong hands. I must blame myself for not having put them carefully away, and am glad that I have possession of them with full knowledge of their value again. I had supposed them worthless, and admission to the prison yard would, indeed, be of small avail. Have a good dinner for us, Brigitta. (*Brigitta goes out.*) How all these discoveries overwhelm me! What a piece of criminal negligence to leave the keys lying around in this way.

Berger

You exaggerate everything this morning, Victor. Ah, there is Von Werner again. (*Von Werner enters.*)

Von Werner

I hope that you are recovered. I returned more out of solicitude for you than for any other reason. Looking over the reports can wait until tomorrow. (*Throughout with queer stares and overdone concern for Von Sendlingen.*)

Von Sendlingen

No, we will proceed at once. You will both dine with me today, and the reading of them can be completed this afternoon.

Von Werner

Have you decided about the Lippert examination?

Berger

We have been giving the matter some consideration.

Von Sendlingen

You will forgive me, Von Werner

Von Werner

I do not suppose I am to be relieved of responsibility. (*Chuckles.*)

Von Sendlingen

Some new evidence has unexpectedly turned up. I should like the examination postponed. It could occur a week from today, and the trial a week or two from that. Can the arrangement be made?

Von Werner

It is within your province to do in the affair as you deem best. And also—(*Exhibiting great surprise.*)

Von Sendlingen

(*Slowly and deliberately.*) I shall preside at the examination.

The Curtain Falls

ACT II

SCENE.—Library of Von Sendlingen as before. It is arranged for a judicial examination. Franz and Brigitta. A week has elapsed.

Brigitta

Everything is ready and it is about time for them to begin.

Franz

I believe that I have done just as you told me; or is there something more? The Baron is very ill, and he always had a dislike to the Court Room. I don't wonder. Just think how old it is, and what scenes have been enacted there.

Brigitta

This is not the first time that an examination has been held in this room. It is a little unusual, but the Judge's condition is a sufficient excuse.

Franz

What is the matter anyhow? You seem to be in the secret, for there is a secret, and you needn't try to deny it. I am an old man, and it is hard that I can't be trusted as well as you, who have not been in this house half as long as I.

Brigitta

Don't find any fault; you are as good and as faithful as you can be, and, when your help is needed, it will be called for, you may be sure.

Franz

Are you to be allowed in the room this morning?

Brigitta

Yes, the Countess Riesner may need me, and perhaps the prisoner as well.

Franz

Don't talk to me about the Countess. She is a dreadful old woman, and she will have people enough to look out for her. You go in to see the prisoner every day, and you are to be at the examination for her sake; she is in the hospital ward now, isn't she?

Brigitta

Yes; her health is utterly broken down. She sees nothing, she speaks to no one, she accepts what is done for her in a dull and unmeaning way, she asks only to be judged, and to die as soon as may be, that all her miseries may come to an end at once.

Franz

Yes, yes, but what have we to do with her? We've had trying cases before now, but never one that sets us all by the ears as this one does. Why should I be left out of it all? It makes me mad, and I'm going to have it changed. I want to help, too.

Brigitta

Hush, they are coming. You will learn about it soon enough, everybody will learn all that there is to be known, I am greatly afraid. (*They pass out.*)

(*Berger and Von Sendlingen enter. The latter has aged perceptibly in the week, his eyes are heavy and dull, his hair has whitened about the temples, and he looks altogether like a very sick man.*)

Von Sendlingen

The day looks dark through the windows, and we may have snow. I feel cold and strengthless.

Berger

It seems sufficiently warm in the room.

Von Sendlingen

No doubt. You and the others will find it so. The chill is in my heart, and a winter bitterer than that outdoors is in my brain.

Berger

You are again allowing yourself to be overmastered by your depression, a state which is wholly foreign to you. I have always observed in you a courageous confronting of untoward conditions, which made you appear more like a man of the elder time than of our own weak and vacillating generation. What has become of your strength in the hour of greatest need?

Von Sendlingen

I do not know. It is my despair that I have it no longer. I grope around in my futile weakness, and grow less and less capable of facing the emergency. I seem to be the plaything of some revengeful power outside and beyond myself that is gradually paralyzing my very heart and soul. Yet I would not have it otherwise, strange to say. As we have sown, so must we reap. Deed is conjoined to deed, no link is missing anywhere, the whole forever dwells in every part, and woe be to him who opposes the overwhelming movement forwards. Wrong can be righted only by an expiation which replaces what has been done by what ought in truth to be. We must pay to the uttermost farthing. I shall judge both my child and myself.

Berger

There must be some way of escape.

Von Sendlingen

Escape? What would you have? You who so deeply know the law cannot talk of escape. A crime cannot be atoned by an injustice. Is there anything that I can do?

Berger

Just now you can shake off the man that you are, and put on again the man that you were. These forebodings verge upon the superstitious. You have always hitherto had fortitude in abundance both for yourself and your friends.

Von Sendlingen

I am, indeed, selfishly forgetful.

(Franz brings in the Countess Riesner, Mariana Brandes, and Dr. Rohn. After the usual greetings, they take the seats pointed out to them. Franz goes out.)

Dr. Rohn

I endeavored to dissuade the Countess from coming at all. Her health, at no time very strong, has suffered much through the agitations of the last months. I fear greatly any further excitements. I suggested to the Countess the writing out of her account of the circumstances and sending it to me.

Von Sendlingen

That would, undoubtedly, have saved the Countess Riesner a disagreeable hour or two, but would hardly have been satisfactory from our point of view. The privileges of rank and station are extensively recognized in our laws and practices, but

at important crises they yield of necessity to higher considerations.

Dr. Rohn

The law in that way is unquestionably defective as in so many others.

Von Sendlingen

I have been a life-long advocate of legal reforms, but have been, nevertheless, inclined to regard the disposition of the law to deal with the person as such, without considering differences of class or riches, as one of its noblest qualities.

Dr. Rohn

Moreover, Miss Brandes is a witness more effective, as she was with the Lippert woman on the morning after the murder.

Von Sendlingen

(*Starts perceptibly.*) We have not begun the investigation as yet.

Countess Riesner

One thing, however, overcame all my scruples. For this I waived my failing health, my increasing pain, my hatred of vulgar publicity.

Berger

The latter you could hardly escape in any case, my dear Countess.

Marianna Brandes

Collect yourself, Madame; be strong. We seem to find that justice in the very seat and palace thereof wears a face and garb different from the one to which we are accustomed. But the right will prevail, heaven watches over us.

Countess

My son's interests bring me here. For that designing and wicked female, who dwelt under my roof, and enjoyed privileges there not ordinarily granted to one in her position in life, I can have only feelings of mingled pity and aversion. I suppose that she came into my house with her plans duly matured. The punishment for such libels upon my sex, who drag our name and purity into the mire, cannot be harsh enough. The world has too many of them, and the removal of one will hardly mend matters.

Von Sendlingen

(*With evident anger.*) I must again make it clear to you that a condemnation before a hearing does not belong in this room.

Countess

Her own act is already her condemnation.

Von Sendlingen

We shall see to it, however, that the consequences of an act do not exceed the act itself.

Countess

My son's welfare concerns me more nearly than that of this scheming and ambitious girl.

Von Sendlingen

Your son has in all probability some views of his own in the matter.

Countess

I have hitherto found him willing to admit that my larger knowledge of life has led me to a clearer understanding of what is needed than he possessed, young as he was and blinded by the excess of feeling.

Berger

He differs from you, then, in this important concern?

Countess

(*Looks at him with some curiosity.*) The defender of crime and debauchery will, doubtless, look upon my son's strange and misguided views with leniency and support.

Berger

The exact seat of the debauchery remains yet to be disclosed and properly held to execration.

Marianna Brandes

There is a Providence which looks down upon the world. It provides for every moment of our existence the exact pain or pleasure which belongs to it. You cannot tell why sorrows should come to those so little deserving them, but be courageous to meet them, dear Countess, and you will arise from them as from a bath of clear waters, nobler, purer, if that be possible.

Countess

My son may appear at the investigation. Should he do so, I wish to say beforehand, that his words will be those of a wholly irresponsible being, and they must not be taken as absolving the criminal from the least shadow of her evil intents.

Dr. Rohn

I am ready to present my professional statement in any form demanded that the young man needs the greatest oversight, and ought not to be heard at all.

Berger

In plain terms you mean that he is mad.

Marianna Brandes

Be calm, dear madame. I warned you of all this. Heaven is over us; it will guide and protect you, the truest of its children.

(Enter Von Werner, overdressed in a somber style of extreme dignity, Dernegg and a guard. After the customary greetings, they take the places prepared for them. At a sign from Von Sendlingen the guard passes out.)

Dernegg

(To Von Sendlingen.) It is your preference, I believe, to make this examination informal. As public prosecutor I am perforce made to proceed against the young person so heavily accused, but inasmuch as the circumstances have never been fully developed, I am only too glad to find it possible to seek extenuating or wholly clearing incidents in this complication of misfortunes.

Von Sendlingen

You express my wishes.

Von Werner

(Raising his hands in horror.) We must guard, however, against the intrusion of sympathy with youth and inexperience. *(Looks with appealing eyes at the Countess.)* Crime is yet crime, whatever its attendants; the State, the whole of civilization, rests upon correct judicial proceedings. *(Gazes profoundly into vacancy.)*

Marianna Brandes

The angels look down upon us again, dear.

Countess

They are forever on the side of the right. Be assured that all will be well. Due punishment

must be meted out upon the offenders against our old and venerated aristocracy.

(Count Henry enters and at a motion from Von Sendlingen seats himself opposite to his mother.)

Countess

(To her son.) You venture here? In your condition of mind? Dr. Rohn, will you act now?

Dr. Rohn

I wish to ask permission and aid in removing Count Henry from the room. I give it as my professional opinion—

Count Henry

I appeal to the Judge. I was never better. This is a manoeuvre to keep me from doing what is the most important act of reparation in my life.

Von Werner

(Hurriedly interrupting.) Dr. Rohn's request is not in accordance with any rule that occurs to me now. *(Smiles.)* All light is desirable in such a preliminary as this. *(Clasps his hands in front of him.)* Count Riesner may be the bearer of very conclusive intelligence. *(Coughs.)* We shall learn all about his condition of mind when he is called upon to speak. His dismissal cannot be entertained now. *(Nods his head sagaciously a number of times.)*

Berger

God be thanked for pedantry once, at least.

(The door at the side opens and Victorine Lipfert enters accompanied by Brigitta and the guard. She walks slowly like a person in a dream. Her eyes stare before her and she seems to see no one. She places her arm over her face as if to hide it, cow-

ers down into the chair assigned her, and trembles piteously in every limb.)

Brigitta

Look up at the good Judge. His heart is full of compassion for everyone—certainly for you.

Berger

(Steps up and speaks softly to her.) Courage, my young friend, courage!

Victorine

(As if to herself.) Why should one suffer so much as I have done? Why does not Death open the door into his rest and peace more easily? Why did they not let me die in the cold out under the trees? Why was I saved for this?

Berger

(Softly.) You shall not die. Life will begin for you again. Speak your mind freely and entirely. You will be heard by ears that wish you well in every way. Stand firm against every false accusation. Hope for the best. Light and life and friendship and love are waiting for you after this trial is over; I promise them to you, my suffering child, I promise them to you.

Victorine

No, no; why do you disturb me? I do not know at all what you can mean. I am ready for the worst; let it only come quickly.

Dernegg

This woman, your honor, is accused of the dreadful crime for whose investigation we are met this morning.

Von Sendlingen

Let her arise and face the Court.

Brigitta

Stand up, Victorine, I am here to support you. Be not afraid.

Victorine

Spare yourself any unnecessary care of me. Whatever fear I had is dead long ago. I have but one anxiety, and that is that they will let me live. What can they want of me?

Von Sendlingen

It is, indeed, a dreadful crime with which you stand charged. Are you guilty or guiltless of these sad accusations? Answer as you value your life and your soul.

Victorine

What can I say to all this? I do not know any man or anything any more. I am a poor dead woman who somehow yet breathes in your presence. I have sinned deeply, I am guilty of much, oh, so much—I am guilty, your Honor, before men and before God—but I have been very ill, and I am ignorant of many things that must have transpired while my heart was burning with pain and remorse and fever.

Dernegg

You are charged with slaying your newly born child.

Victorine

Ah, God is my witness—surely he has not altogether abandoned me—as the angels in heaven know and could tell if they only had pity on a miserable woman like me—as the good Saviour, Christ, is aware—I can reveal nothing about the death of my child; they placed it cold and still in

my arms; that is all I know about it; I am not sure that it ever breathed the chilly morning air; punish me for my fault, do with me as you will, bring me quickly into the arms of waiting death, but of the crime that you speak so loud against me I am not guilty.

Berger

Your honor will doubtless allow me to enter the formal plea of not guilty in behalf of my client who will tell her story afterwards.

Von Werner

(*With tremendous and chilling bitterness.*) We shall reach no adequate results in these extraordinary proceedings unless more usual and better methods prevail.

Countess

Why proceed with the examination at all? Would it not be better to wait until the regular trial? Such would be my pleasure, and a properly accredited deposition would relieve me of the disagreeableness of a further presence in Court.

Marianna Brandes

Heaven will surely bring this to pass.

Von Sendlingen

The ascertainment of the real facts in the case, and all the facts, can, perhaps, be more successfully achieved by some departure from legal usage, and we should hardly be justified in the convening of this assembly unless we showed results from it valuable both to the prisoner and the State.

Count Henry

I suppose it is thoroughly understood by all present that I am here in support of the prisoner.

Countess

We know it only too well.

Victorine

(*Apparently seeing him for the first time.*) Is he against me too? Did they succeed in tearing him from me? No doubt he has abandoned me. I tried by all means in my power to see him, but they sent him away, and I had to suffer alone.

Brigitta

He is your friend. He never abandoned you. You have many friends here, more than you know of at present.

Von Sendlingen

The statement of the Countess will be first in order. Many of the facts are undisputed and need no prolonged attention; the evident ailing condition of the accused warns us to be as brief as possible. Her strength must be as fully restored as may be for the coming trial. Let no one speak aught save what he deems to be the truth—the very truth itself. The Countess will proceed.

Countess

The motherless children left to me by my dear, departed daughter had been for some time under the religious care of Miss Brandes, who had been in my family for a number of years, a guide and a mentor in the higher life which we should all live and of which so few of the younger women of this ungodly generation know anything.

Von Sendlingen

This is wholly irrelevant, my good Countess. Miss Brandes will be heard later.

Countess

Miss Brandes' health, however, was not good, and the care of the children wore upon her terribly. I trembled lest I should lose her. I made up my mind to have a governess for them. I searched with care, and hoped to have found a suitable one in Victorine Lippert, who came with satisfactory testimonials, and whose shyness and reserve, conspicuously assumed at our first meeting and for some time after very successfully maintained, inclined me to favor her. I supposed that I saw in her what Marianna—Miss Brandes—had been a few years before. How woefully was I deceived. The timidity and devotion to duty which marked the woman's behavior during her first months in my house were thrown aside at once with the return of my son from Paris, where he had been for some time connected with the Austrian Embassy. The friendship, wholesome and elevating with Miss Brandes, which I had gladly seen growing from her advent into our circle, was abruptly broken off, and poor Marianna was constantly in tears over the rebuffs she was obliged to endure. So sudden was the change coming over Victorine Lippert that the fact of her having played a shrewd and well matured part was apparent at once. Her real character came to the surface, she shamefully and passionately threw herself into Count Henry's arms, and evidently hoped to gain everything from his youth and inexperience.

Count Henry

Mother, I must still call you by that name, how can you speak thus in the shadow of death, the dark cloud of ignominy, hovering over a woman like yourself?

Victorine

(*With a pale burst of joy.*) I am not wholly abandoned. I shall die, I shall go alone into the abyss, the gloom there is deep, but I see the beckoning of friendly hands, their light pierces the darkness around me as I sink into it beyond recall.

Von Werner

(*Very decidedly, with waving of the hands.*) The Countess must go on without interruption.

Countess

The consequences rapidly ensued when unprincipled passion in the woman meets more than half way the hot blood of the young man of today. The latter cannot be blamed; these are mere and common incidents in his career. At last the woman's condition was such that her further stay in my house was no longer endurable. I was forced to make it plain to her that she must go. She proved refractory, but she went, nevertheless.

Dernegg

That is the whole of your evidence?

Berger

The conduct of the accused is very differently reported by other witnesses.

Countess

I know nothing further directly. Miss Brandes saw the woman on the morning after she left my house.

Von Sendlingen

Miss Brandes will take up the thread of the narrative where the Countess has left it.

Marianna Brandes

As I am heard in Heaven, I will tell in a few words what I saw further, and I will not permit myself to deviate a hair's breadth from the narrow path I must pursue. How right the Countess was to keep her son from this contamination—

Countess

May I not be heard a moment? I have known the woman speaking for years, you all know her, and—

Von Werner

No, no; this is an interruption. (*Half rises and smiles.*) Miss Brandes will go on.

Marianna Brandes

Heaven aid me to bear calumny. I surely can in the service of the right. To save the house from further scandal, Miss Lippert was forced to leave. True it is, that it was an inclement night, and the distance to the nearest village considerable. On the morning following, quite early, I thought it best, accompanied by a faithful serving man, to find out what had become of Miss Lippert. As we passed through the wood intervening between the house and the village, we found her delirious on the ground, a dead child with cruel finger marks on its neck by her side. A woman from the village was beside her.

Berger

It had snowed during the night?

Marianna Brandes

I believe so. My memory does not serve me well in regard to these minor points.

Berger

Is the woman from the village somewhere at hand this morning?

Dernegg

She lies in her home very ill and was wholly unfit to come. We hope to produce her and the serving man at the trial.

Von Sendlingen

This is all?

Dernegg

I believe this is all for the present.

Berger

(*To Von Sendlingen.*) You doubtless wish to interrogate the accused?

Von Sendlingen

You have heard, Victorine Lippert, this arraignment, which, I am informed, is supported by other corroborative statements. You can now refute it by such means as are within your power. Speak fearlessly; you are in the presence of justice; nothing shall come to you as punishment save what you have duly brought upon yourself.

Victorine

I am weak, and my head whirls. I do not understand all that has been going on. I have done great wrong, and I ought to be punished. They have told a great many things, I have been bitterly hurt while listening to them. Why do you wish a repetition from me?

Countess

She confesses her guilt. What need we more?

Berger

She will speak for herself in a moment. We have letters to dispute the charges of premeditated plotting; we need also very much to hear from the peasant woman.

Count Henry

And you need to hear from me.

Brigitta

Stand up, child, and tell your story. The Judge looks upon you mildly and generously.

Von Sendlingen

Did you plot against the peace of this noble family?

Victorine

(*Starting as if awakening.*) Did I plot against anyone? Who was I to think of plots? I thought but of my young charges, they were sweet and good, and it was a pleasure to be with them. I was then but a mere girl, I had lived only in the seclusion of the school where my mother had placed me. When she died, it was necessary for me to do something for myself. What knowledge had I of men and the world? The brilliant life in the great house was such a change to me. I did not feel myself at home in it, the Countess was cold and imperious, and Miss Brandes told me about doing things which I did not approve, saying one thing and meaning another. I was bewildered with it all.

Marianna Brandes

Shameless creature! Protect me, Countess! (*She*

covers her face with her handkerchief and seems to be weeping.)

Victorine

I had been warned about the way of life in great families, but I had forgotten at first. At last, I thought that I saw through it all, and began to be more myself, and stronger. Then the Count came—and then—

Berger

Do not falter. We listen to you very attentively. Every word you utter is important.

Victorine

The Count came, the house was always full of guests, he seemed tired of the life which only feebly aped the life he had been living in Paris, we were then thrown much together. Spare me additional details; you know it all as well as I can tell it.

Von Sendlingen

Much depends upon the story as it comes from your lips. Did the Count promise you marriage?

Victorine

Yes, yes; he has my mother's ring, and I have the one he gave me. *(She shows upon her finger a quaint circlet set with alternate small diamonds and pearls.)*

Countess

An heirloom in our family. It must be restored to us.

Count Henry

I promised her marriage, your Honor.

Von Werner

(In his usual prompt manner.) This must

cease. If these interpolations recur, we must undertake another form of examination.

Von Sendlingen

The accused will go on—

Victorine

We saw a great deal of each other. Miss Brandes encouraged me in many ways to allow the intimacy to take its course. The Countess told me that her son was never happy at home, and she hoped that I would not let the time hang heavy on his hands. Miss Brandes assured me again and again that Heaven gave special privileges to the rich and the titled, and that it was a duty to obey the higher will.

Countess

I protest against all this.

Marianna Brandes

We shall not be forsaken. Let us look to the skies for protection. Shameless wicked creature!

Von Sendlingen

We are all attentive to your story.

Victorine

I was carried away in the storm. Ah, God, that I should say such things here, that I should thus be forced to bare my inmost heart before strangers, and before those who have treated me cruelly!

Brigitta

Strength, Victorine, strength!

Victorine

(*As if mastering herself with much effort.*) Yet what does it signify to me? Away false modesty and maidenly reserve! They have been torn from me savagely already. After what I have endured,

these last pangs are easily bearable! I loved Count Henry with all my soul. I was young, I had no one to counsel me, the atmosphere of that house was hot and intoxicating. He seemed the one generous person there. I believed that he loved me, he promised to marry me, and—oh, Heaven, and my mother in Heaven, forgive me—I fell.

Countess

We are able to give the particulars of your life before you came to us. You were retained at school with the utmost difficulty. The wildness was in your blood and very origin.

Victorine

Why do you let her insult me thus? I stand here pleading for my life, not that I value it, take it and take it quickly, and release me from the scorn and agony. I have sinned, and I accept ignominy and death for my punishment, but I am not the only one to blame. I did not sin alone, must the woman always expiate alone? And save me from those women, they are blacker than the storm and wickedder than night!

Countess

Who will listen to your ravings or your accusations? Such women as you must suffer alone. What pity or consideration have you the right to ask? Crime and intrigue lead to the gutter and the scaffold.

Victorine

Oh, God, I thought that I had patience to the end. I had brought myself to believe that I should soon be out of the whirl of sorrow and at peace, but the whole affair sweeps back into my brain.

Why should I suffer alone? Punish her, the deceiver, the procuress, punish him, the stately man of the world, who breaks hearts for his pastime! Are there two Justices in this world, one for the poor, and another for the rich? One for the woman and another for the man? Have I not borne the heat of exposure shrivelling and devouring me? Shall she go on to catch more maidens in her net? Shall he walk free to indulge his passions again and again? I am poor and friendless, he is rich, and his haughty mother laughs at these boyish escapades. There must be right somewhere, the same for high and low, the same for man and woman. Why is not she arraigned as well as I? Why is he not at my side?

Count Henry

(*Impetuously.*) I am at your side! I am ready to walk into the cell with you! I am shamed beyond measure, I am broken and overcome. I would take upon myself all that they can inflict upon us both. What you have endured is far too much. You should pass hence, free as the air, without a stain, and it is I who should suffer for my wife—my wife in the sight of Heaven, and I swear it in the sight of man, if I can but bring it to pass.

Von Werner

(*The pedantic tone to be maintained in this speech.*) This is unprecedented. Silence. We may be obliged to call upon the guard. This is scandalous. We must follow the proper course of the investigation.

Dr. Rohn

I beg leave to interfere. We had reason to ex-

pect some such wilful exhibition on the part of the Count. I must ask that he be removed and placed in custody. I am ready to show that for some time his mind has been giving way. It is for this very cause that he was brought home from Paris. His talk is the wildest insanity.

Countess

Let me go, I cannot stay longer.

Marianna

Angels and ministers of grace look down upon us.

Von Werner

(*Throughout with forced voice and extravagant gesticulation.*) There must be order in the Court. The self accusations of the Count signify nothing. He is not now on trial nor is it our business to look into his rightness of mind. We must allow the witness to go on. But let all see to it that we are not again disturbed. You agree with me? (*To Von Sendlingen.*)

Von Sendlingen

We must hear your story through, Victorine Lippert.

Victorine

What more have I to tell? It is soon finished. They became furious with me. I feared for my life and the life of my child. I was wretchedly ill, maddened, beside myself. The Count disappeared. They told me that he had gone to England to be wedded to some one in his own rank in life—what do men mean by rank in life?

Count Henry

Poor girl!

Victorine

They drove me from the house, ailing as I was, drove me forth with scorn, with savage insults. They would not let me clothe myself properly. I had but an old shawl, worn and small, for my head, and nothing to wrap around me. Thinly clad as I was, they forced me out into the night and storm. They told me to betake myself to the first muck-heap, and bring my brat into the world there. The night was fearful. The winds were howling, and a wet snow was falling. Not a light anywhere. Some instinct led me to the wood. I found a place a little dryer than the rest. I fell down in frightful agony. I became wild, delirious. Then I knew nothing at all. When I opened my eyes, I found a woman and Miss Brandes beside me. They put the dead boy in my arms. If there were any finger marks on his neck, I know nothing of them. I cannot tell what happened in that night. I only know that I wanted to die and take my baby with me. Oh, your Honor, do you think that I could have hurt my little baby; I am guiltless of that!

Countess

Who will believe this trumped-up story, and from her whose mother—

Victorine

My mother! She is a saint in Heaven. She looks down in pity on her child. I shall go to her soon, and she will fold me in her arms, and I shall forget, and peace will be mine once more.

Countess

Her mother! That person set her daughter a

worthy example. What could one expect in the child? The mother before her was a wanton.

Victorine

That is a lie—a base lie—an infamous lie—my mother is a saint in Heaven! Yes, I have told you all. I am ready to die, if you judge me to that. What men may think of me, a dying woman, has little import to me. God knows the truth. He knows that my story is true; I make no defense; but here in the very presence of death, it may be, I say that my mother was good and pure; never was a mother better, never a woman purer. She trusted a villain in the form of a human being—and he must have been the worst of men to have abandoned her—but she was noble. I ask nothing for myself, but blame her not because I am unworthy. (*Bursts into violent and hysteric weeping.*)

Count Henry

Let me be heard in her behalf. Let me have an opportunity to corroborate her story, even though it tear me forever from those that I love and honor yet in spite of all.

Von Sendlingen

Look at the accused! Terrible indeed it is to hear her.

(*Throughout the act Von Sendlingen has shown by face and gestures his extraordinary interest in the accused, and at this point his excitement and agitation are most marked.*)

Von Werner

(*In his exaggerated manner.*) We must adjourn this court. Nothing useful can be gained by prolonging these disgraceful scenes.

Count Henry

Will you not listen to me?

Von Sendlingen

It is best to adjourn. (*In a choking voice.*)

Von Werner

(*Assuming fully the airs of the sole master.*) Lead away the prisoner.

(*While they are doing so, Count Henry crosses the stage, and seizes Victorine by the hand. She allows him to take it, and they gaze each into the other's eyes a moment. The guard steps in between and Count Henry passes out rapidly.*)

Von Werner

The examination is closed. I am afraid but little of value has come from it, but such use as can be made of it will be done.

Countess

(*To Dr. Rohn.*) Look after Henry.

Dr. Rohn

He has gone already.

Countess

May I ask assistance in taking my son into proper custody, so that he may not in his folly injure himself?

Von Werner

(*A little more in a normal manner, but stiffly and with command.*) Such help as we can give is as a matter of course yours.

(*Countess, Marianna and Dr. Rohn leave the room.*) What is the trouble, Von Sendlingen? Arouse yourself. You have been behaving strangely during most of the examination, and I saw that you

were far from recovered from your recent illness. It was therefore that I took so much upon myself.

Von Sendlingen

I owe you great thanks.

Dernegg

You appoint the trial for two weeks from today?

Von Werner

(*Learnedly, and with the judicial mien.*) I do not see any reason for delay. No attention can be given to the wild ravings of Count Henry. The young man's conscience is aroused, an unusual fact among his class. He must be looked after and protected. His very remorse shows him to be the more worthy of it. The indiscretions of youth must not wholly cloud his future. The testimony of Miss Brandes and the village woman is clear as to the guilt of the Lippert girl. Things are very wrong in our world today, and we must not be too lenient. The Minister of Justice urges severity in cases of this kind.

Dernegg

Will the Baron preside at the trial?

Berger

Von Sendlingen—

Von Sendlingen

No, I am not well, Von Werner will do so.

Von Werner

(*With ill-concealed pleasure.*) I wish you an early improvement. (*Von Werner and Dernegg pass out.*)

Berger

What have you done? Placed the fate of your innocent child in the hands of that unthinking man!

Von Sendlingen

I could not do otherwise. I am a Judge as well as a father.

Berger

What a tragedy is all this! The good and noble are the ones who suffer in it all! Were you willing to swerve from the prescribed path, what might you not gain?

Von Sendlingen

Do you advise me to that?

Berger

No, but why should things be thus? Can we not find something to do? Does not a solution of this grief and difficulty exist, or are we greater and gentler in our thought than is the destiny which prevades the world?

Von Sendlingen

There are two worlds, George, the world of fate, and the world of will. They do not necessarily coincide. When this is the case, our wills may interfere and set affairs to rights, but if in so doing we offend against the purposes of fate, we must endure the consequences, whatever they may be.

Berger

Are law and right always coincident?

Von Sendlingen

Perhaps not.

Berger

You refuse to take upon yourself the presiding at the trial because a father should not intervene in a case affecting his daughter; but you place the trial in charge of a man who is sure to give prece-

dency to the formal and technical. Have you the right to injure the right in the interest of the merely legal? Do you not thus enact a greater wrong by being true to the law, and bitterly false to the just and right?

Von Sendlingen

I will find a way out of the maze.

Berger

What do you mean?

Von Sendlingen

Would that the hour might be spared me that will solve for you this riddle. You will some day echo the wish from your innermost heart, dear friend. Meanwhile a thousand thanks and good day.

(Berger leaves. Von Sendlingen goes to his desk, unlocks a drawer, and takes out the rusted bunch of keys. He selects a small one, and looks at it intently.)

Von Sendlingen

I hold the key, indeed, and I shall not hesitate to use it when there is need.

The Curtain Falls

ACT III

SCENE.—The library of Von Sendlingen as before. On the wall hangs a new and superb portrait of the Judge in his Judge's robes. It is evening and the room is brilliantly lighted. Three months have passed.

Brigitta enters leading Victorine.

Brigitta

How firm and strong and noble you were at the trial!

Victorine

I had learned wisdom at my former ordeal. What a life has been mine! All other people seem able to give expression to their thoughts and feelings, and friends hang upon their words, and encourage them with smiles to reveal what is going on within them. I, however, am forever thrust back upon myself. When I claim the usual rights of everyone born into the world, I must at once suffer the direct punishment. Do you suppose it will be different up there? After I have gone through the chill and murky avenue which leads through death to light? Up there in the silver realms of peace, where my mother is waiting for me?

Brigitta

(Stroking her hair, and gazing at her fondly.)
Child, it is indeed a strange and dreary night which engirds you, but I know that the bitterest part of it is past, and I see the quivering of morn-
ing across the apparently moveless blackness. Take

heart, and do not sink from the height of simple courage on which you stood to the admiration of every one.

Victorine

The morning comes, a flood of radiance, a morning of forgiveness, a radiance of consolation, over there, on the other side of the dark waves, which I so long to cross. Ah me! Why is young life so strong? I have had enough to break a dozen lives. But where is Count Henry? I have not dared to ask that question before, although it has been constantly on my lips. I had nearly died when he abandoned me, his sudden return was an unspeakable uplift. Has he again deserted me? His mother has won him away from me?

Brigitta

No, indeed. He has left his great home, and all their efforts to find him have been unavailing.

Victorine

Shall I see him again?

Brigitta

Yes, you shall certainly see him again.

Victorine

But why am I here? Why did you come in that mysterious way to my cell, and lead me forth through the prison yard, and that small scarce-seen gate in the wall? What do you want with me, a girl condemned to death for a heinous crime?

Brigitta

You were wrongfully condemned. The good Judge felt that a condemnation produced by Von Werner, the pedant, could not be right. I am not versed in such affairs, but the letter of the law has been too strictly followed.

Victorine

What then? What comes of that? And this strange release? This taking me out of my prison?

Brigitta

The good Judge has desired it. Appeals of all sorts to all sorts of courts have been made in your favor. Unfortunately they failed. The Minister of Justice has decided against you.

Victorine

All this has been done for me? And wherefore?

Brigitta

In the interest of justice, and now the good Judge wishes to see you and you have been brought here.

Victorine

He is coming to see me? Oh, I remember him. He was so mild and full of sympathy for me. I had a strange and unaccountable feeling as I looked at him. Had I ever seen him before, do you suppose?

Brigitta

He has taken your misfortunes very much to heart. All the world knows him and loves him and honors him. Speak to him freely, he can be of much assistance to you.

Victorine

Let it be over, as soon as it may be. I only ask that his may be my last visit—save yours, Brigitta, do not let me lose you. I cannot endure any more. I shall evade their penalty. Death will come to me soon; long before that fearful day arrives. I would much prefer to be alone, to make my peace with everything, and then to suffer no interruption. The good minister I can see and hear; he always leaves me calmer. You will pardon all this, and receive

such sincere and profound thanks as a poor girl like me can offer. Let the Baron come now, and then let me prepare for the end, which is not far off. (*Throwing her arms around Brigitta.*) You will stay with me during this interview, you must stay with me.

Brigitta

I believe that the Baron wishes to see you alone. He will be very kind to you and he has much to say to you.

(*Von Sendlingen appears at the door.*) There now. (*Kisses her.*) Open up all your heart to him. (*Embraces her again and passes out.*)

Von Sendlingen

You are feeling much stronger, I hope, this morning.

Victorine

I cannot echo that hope. I gladly find that I am getting weaker every hour. It will be over soon; I shall need no one's care very long; and I shall escape that—that last horror.

Von Sendlingen

My poor child, I know. But you are young, you must not lose hope. Heaven will interfere in your behalf.

Victorine

Heaven indeed. How long is it since Heaven took any care of the poor and miserable? Why bring into my mind the thought of pardon? That would be terrible. How should I re-enter life? It has neither need nor desire for women like me; but my agony will not be very long now. I shall leave this cell to rest in death.

Von Sendlingen

Surely the physician has given you no such intimation.

Victorine

No one is to be blamed. I read it plainly enough in his face and eyes and unwillingness to answer my questions. Then the Minister with his many precepts and warnings—

Von Sendlingen

Poor child, they have not been torturing you with their zealous anxieties for your spiritual welfare?

Victorine

Oh, no. With the abandonment of my mother in my memory, and my own fate before my eyes, it is hard to believe in a just and merciful power that rules the world and men. The good minister gives me such consolation as he can, but it is not by him that I am helped. I believe that there will be recovery somehow, somewhere, from all these ills. There was one thing, however, that the minister asked me, and he came back to it again and again, although I could give him but one answer. It torments me yet to think of it.

Von Sendlingen

What may that have been, my child?

Victorine

You ask me about it, too. I cannot tell why I speak so freely to you. Yet I saw from the first that you meant to be kind to me. You were so different from the severe judge, who frowned upon me down from his great height of goodness. Then I am a poor dying girl, and you are older and gentle and wise.

Von Sendlingen

I do not wish you to give yourself any needless anguish, but tell me what was it that the minister asked of you?

Victorine

He asked me whether there was any one to whom I cared to send a message, any friend that thought much of me, and I told him there was none.

Von Sendlingen

Not one?

Victorine

Oh, Count Henry, I suppose that I shall never see him again. Besides his mother says he is not well. The minister, though, persisted in asking me questions, and spoke to me of my—my father.

Von Sendlingen

And what did you answer him?

Victorine

He wished me to say that I forgave him. I must be in the right spirit before I enter Eternity: what answer could I give him? I told him that I did not know who my father was, my mother always refused to mention the name, and I further told him that I scorned my father, that my misfortunes were made by my father, that I might pity, but should never be able to forgive my father.

Von Sendlingen

My child, do not forget the shadow in which we are standing. Say no bitter words. They cannot have a real place in your heart. What do you know of this man? Perhaps he was true and sore-beset and forced by the bitterest of circum-

stances to the course which it may have been a very living death for him to take.

Victorine

I know him; I need not have seen him for that. I understand his character, his high and noble name, his circumstances, his career that faithfulness to my mother would have interfered with. I know him from the lips of my mother, the saintliest and purest of women. Once only she spoke to me, "Had he been of light and frivolous mind," she said, "I might have forgiven him; had he been one of the mere pleasure-loving crew, I might have blamed my own folly and overlooked his sin, but he was strong and earnest and thoughtful. Life to him was no mere game to be played lightly; young as he was, he had penetrated somewhat into its meaning. His abandonment of me was, therefore, no mere impulse of the moment; it was the cool calculating decision of one who took into account all points of view. He left me because I should have been a hindrance to his success." So she spoke to me, and what am I to think of him? Her death—and my murder—be upon his head! May he meet the full reward of his deed! I only dare not say that I *hate* his very memory.

Von Sendlingen

Unsay that word! You are not aware of the wrong that you are doing. There is much to be told you, and many extenuating circumstances to be unfolded to you. Do not be wrathful. He has suffered even as you and your mother have suffered. He would make expiation by all ways that lie in his power. Name, rank, fortune, honorable recognition of genuine work done for his fellow-men, he

would give all to learn that in some way he could undo the miserable past, he could upbuild a dwelling for those he has wronged, he could yield up his life to make atonement.

Victorine

Who authorizes you to say all this to me? Have you come from him? Has he sent you here? In this hour to look upon the last effect of his act, the last poisonous flower that has grown from the root of his pleasure? Do you know him? Why did he not come himself? My mother was his lawful wife; why did he abandon her?

Von Sendlingen

What have I said? Did I tell you that I knew your father? I was but constructing a possible case;—you must be willing, child, to forgive as you hope yourself to be forgiven. Your life has been, indeed, an unhappy one, but why allow yourself to indulge in such bitterness of feeling? You have made your peace, you have pardoned, you have no more hatred for any one; surely not for him whose punishment will be direful, I am certain, who doubtless would be willing to take your place here if he only could.

Victorine

Ask me to pardon or forgive? Who has looked on me with mercy or kindness? What was the fate of my poor mother?

Von Sendlingen

Surely life holds nothing better than this, to forgive injuries, and to pardon offenses, however great. As for me, I would that I might put myself in your place. I would that I might exchange everything

with you, my past with yours, my experiences with yours, my joys and loves with yours. I would gladly assume all, have suffered all, be weighed down with all, rather than stand where I do now.

Victorine

These are empty words. Why do you come here to torment me with these strange and inexplicable speeches?

Von Sendlingen

I pray you will pardon me. You cannot think me so vain and cruel as to be here without full regard for your welfare and betterment. I know that you are pure and innocent—pure—like your mother—who looks down upon you and me—who blesses you—and—and—

Victorine

What can you have known of her? Encircle me as you will with your mist of words, but do not touch her.

Von Sendlingen

Listen to me. I have hitherto shrunk from making myself entirely clear. I should have known that the simple truth is always the best, always gives help and life and light. I do know your father. I come from him. I wish to receive from you the assurance that you will not be too harsh in your view of him, that you will consent to see him. His has been no ignoble life; whatever his youthful sins, he has sought to undo them; men speak of him in high and endearing terms.

Victorine

I have suspected that such was your errand. No, I must not see him. I think that my mother loved

him to the last, even though she spoke bitterly of him to me. It was but once that she did so, and then she was overcome by illness and sorrow. She asked me not to despise him, but how could I do otherwise?

Von Sendlingen

Your mother judged him aright. He left her not out of weakness, not out of frivolous disregard for deep and real relations, but just as little out of cold and calculating consideration of worldly claims and dignities. He was held by no mere external constraint, but by a deeper and more inward pressure of his bringing up, of his convictions, of his view of manhood and the life around him, in which he, too, would have to bear his part.

Victorine

The part of a rich and petted darling, the part of one of those who have everything made easy for them, for whom all the rewards are gathered and waiting, while we, my mother and I, belong to the unhappy poor, who draw no breath without hardship, whose life is a something permitted us by those needing us, and who are to wear the thorny crown of shame and destruction at the last. No one with a heart ever made this world; it could only have been a God who forgot everything save his own pleasure. Just as that man—my father—forsooth,—did, fit scion of nobility and power;—and will you explain to me why he never in the slightest degree gave himself any care about his child?

Von Sendlingen

He did not know that a child of his was alive.

Victorine

What is that you say?

Von Sendlingen

Furthermore, I can assure you, had the knowledge come to him by whatsoever way or accident that you, his child, were alive and struggling with the bitter fate that here confronts us, he would never have rested until he had drawn you to his breast, until in his home, in his arms, he had shielded you from every conflict with want and wrong and the hardness of men.

Victorine

(*Gloomily.*) What have I to do with it? If he is filled to the brim with pain, it is but his just punishment. What have not we, my mother and I, borne, and all through him.

Von Sendlingen

Would you not spare him a single pang?

Victorine

I do not know how to answer you. I wish no one any ill, I have not sunk so low as that, not even Marianna, who has lied about me at this time when my life is at stake. If he is such a man as you say that he is, he must now be filled with a remorse at which I shudder; yet can his agony be no greater than mine, and my fault is not measurable with his, nor does he repent with the sacrifice of his life and his honor.

Von Sendlingen

Perchance with both.

Victorine

I will not hear it! It does not concern me! I will not have you rob me of my feeling against

that man! You ask me to fail in justice to my mother; he suffers as he ought, and that is enough!

Von Sendlingen

You are right, and you are just, above all, just! You are capable of largeness of spirit, you above all women, you can forgive this worst of sinners and criminals.

Victorine

Did he send you to make this request for him?

Von Sendlingen

Will you deny him even that poor privilege?

Victorine

I deny him nothing; yet he might have been sure that I should feel thus toward him.

Von Sendlingen

He did not think that you would be so hard to him.

Victorine

Did he not? He thinks, perhaps, that all will be forgiven him because he wishes to overwhelm the guilty, the condemned woman, with the honor of a visit. This is the noble, the deep-feeling man!

Von Sendlingen

You wrong him! You wrong him!

Victorine

I will not see him, I cannot see him! Keep him away from me!

Von Sendlingen

I cannot promise that.

Victorine

This too I must bear! It is too much! I cannot hear another word!

Von Sendlingen

His life, his reason, depends upon it!

Victorine

I wish nobody's death, I wish nobody's harm! I would have him live if he yet cares to live! I forgive him! Almighty God in Heaven, strengthen me, I forgive him, but I cannot see him!

Von Sendlingen

There is one privilege that you can grant him. You can let him link his fate with yours. You can let him enter into the feelings of your heart, and live with you the breath which you draw. You can let him make the sacrifice which he longs to make, to throw off the adventitious garb of worldly successes which he is clothed withal, and take upon himself the toil which is too much for you, the toil of restoring to you all of which you have been deprived, and which belongs to you of right, to take upon himself a father's real task, the building around you of a world which will enable you to think and act as you ought, to overthrow the hostility which has met you from the first, and to assure to you the attainment of what your young heart sees and seeks. Grant him this, Victorine.

Victorine

I want for nothing. I am prepared for the death that is so close at hand.

Von Sendlingen

If that dark hour should come, his place is at your side, his hand should be in yours; his right is to share every gloom which belongs to your peril, and every hope which accompanies your possible rescue.

Victorine

How you disturb and trouble me! Perhaps what you wish is best. Of what avail are any doubts or tumults of mine, the last glimmerings of thoughts and emotions which fleet through the soul of a condemned girl? I have been very weak and yielding, and my strength cannot resist any more; wronged as I and mine have been, trampled into the dust as all our most precious longings have been, miserable as has been the cup which the world has given us to drink, I would not add to the horror of my existence by any needless harshness even to him. Let it be as you ask.

Von Sendlingen

God be thanked for that, and you, my child, a thousand times, you, my child, my child—

Victorine

What is this thought that gleams through my brain—you, you—

Von Sendlingen

Yes, Victorine, I am your—

Victorine

Father? Father?

Von Sendlingen

Come to me, my daughter, let me clasp you in these arms that have so hungered to hold you. Let my heart beating against your heart, know itself permitted to work for and help you, Victorine.

Victorine

Shelter and guardianship I need very much from the world, from myself, from my memories, from my—father? father?

Von Sendlingen

You are mine now as you should have been always?

Victorine

Whatever comes will find me strong to face and endure it. Take comfort to yourself, but, believe me, I say it with what is almost my dying breath, I am innocent except for the misery of having loved too much.

Von Sendlingen

I know it, my child. It is the cruel law, that, having been brought into existence to secure the right, through its own weakness, brings to pass the bitterest wrong. But it shall not do it. I will save you though I tear the fabric of the law in pieces with these very hands. My child, my daughter.

Victorine

Father.

(She sinks into his outstretched arms. He passionately covers her face, her neck, her hair with kisses.)

Von Sendlingen

(Calls.) Brigitta—Brigitta. *(Brigitta enters.)* There you are now. Go take my daughter away. I shall not have her long. Prepare her for everything. *(Embraces Victorine.)* There is much to be told you and to be arranged. Come back soon, Brigitta. *(Victorine and Brigitta pass out. The Judge silently paces back and forth. In a few moments, Brigitta returns.)*

Brigitta

There is no one in the house but ourselves.

Von Sendlingen

I must act then quickly. What a thing is this for me to do, Brigitta?

Brigitta

All will come out right. You are acting for the best, as always. She is brave and firm; she is resting now, and seems stronger than I supposed. Everything will go well.

Von Sendlingen

I hope so,—but with me. (*A knock. Brigitta passes out and returns with Berger.*)

Berger

It has stopped raining at last. You look a little white, Brigitta. I cannot wonder at that. The life of so many years is broken, and changes are always trying. (*Brigitta bows to him and leaves.*) You are quite ready for the evening, dear friend, I hope. I shall expect you to stand firm tonight as you have done so long, and then we will look out for the future.

Von Sendlingen

I am thinking of that future.

Berger

How much you have to endure, Victor, and how nobly you are doing it.

Von Sendlingen

Could a more unfortunate complication be imagined, George? Could a more diabolic fate be invented against any man? And she is innocent, Marianna Brandes perjured herself.

Berger

Yes, the death penalty could only have been brought about by a Judge so narrow as Von Werner. Then the uproar among the people, the dread

of possible revolutionary excesses among them, steels the heart of the Minister of Justice, and the final appeal is denied save for the granting of a few months' reprieve to give the sick girl a little more strength.

Von Sendlingen

That seems a piteous mockery, does it not? The mere prolongation of her agony; it may turn out very different from the Minister's expectations. In spite of all care of the doctor and myself, she gains very slowly, and she may slip through our grasp at any moment.

Berger

A consummation, perhaps, devoutly to be prayed for.

Von Sendlingen

No, that would be the last verge of cruelty; an innocent woman should be saved.

Berger

Fortunately there is yet time. The emperor—

Von Sendlingen

The emperor? Do you forget the terrible affair of the attempted assassination? What can be done with the Emperor in his wounded and angered condition? That ruffian's assault upon him seemed to me like a bolt of vengeance from the very heavens. Just as I was on the point of making a personal appeal, was going to tell him all, and intercede for her and for me, that villain wounds him as he is riding through the street. That takes away the last hope. Everything has been tried and everywhere the same inexpugnable opposition confronts us. Now my term of office here is ended and I must be away

to another city. It is thus that one is forced to the last desperate act.

(A knock. Brigitta crosses the room, and Dernegg and Von Werner enter. Brigitta passes out again as she had come in.)

Von Werner

(He is elaborately dressed. He is dignified to the point of absurdity. He speaks with the most pompous of exaggerations.) It has cleared up rapidly, and, while the streets are rather muddy, yet nothing now will interfere with the several torch-light processions. We left one marshalling a short distance below. *(Goes to a glass to adjust his neck-tie.)*

Dernegg

The town has never been so stirred to its depths. You can look upon the approval of your life in this community as one of the rewards, perhaps, to be expected, but none the less gratifying when it comes. We lose the best Judge in all Austria; but your crowning career is opening to you; your promotion is another step on the way, not a long one, to the highest place of all.

Von Sendlingen

You are both of you very kind as is also my good Berger to come so early, and give me the honor of your company to the hotel, where the processions are to be viewed, and afterward the banquet occurs. And now I recall another matter, George, did you engage a room for me? I shall need some change of dress after the banquet, if I take the late train for Vienna.

Berger

All has been seen to; I have engaged for you the small room which you have had before. The hotelkeeper told me that it was the one which you always used. It has a door opening on an inner staircase and a hallway but little traversed, so that you can make your final escape to your carriage without encountering any interruptions.

Von Sendlingen

Yes, that is right. There are always on these occasions so many farewells to be said, that one never knows when he can tear himself loose from them, and I must on no account fail to make my train tonight.

Berger

Is it not about time for us to go?

Dernegg

There is no need of haste. The Judge looks tired, and not very well. Surely you have recovered your health fully?

Von Sendlingen

I am afraid not, and I imagine that I never shall. The trouble is a serious one. The physicians seem little able to reach it, and I allow for that reason no new ambitions to enter my mind; who knows when the end may come? It is nearer than any of us thinks.

(*Shouts are heard outside gradually coming nearer.*)

Dernegg

That is the band of workingmen, headed by John Novyrok; they are coming here, I believe. They wish to make a presentation to the Baron.

Dernegg

Prepare yourself for their laudations.

(There is a knock. Brigitta appears. After a pause Novyrok comes with a committee of working-men. Franz also enters and stands at one side with Brigitta. Novyrok advances: he places on the table a loving cup.)

Von Sendlingen

You are most welcome, friends. This evening would have been lacking in one of its most essential features to me, if I had not met you here. I have endeavored to understand the point of view from which you see things, and I have sympathized with many of your hopes and plans. The difficulties in the way are serious and manifold, but the light of the new and noble shines clearly upon you from below the horizon. The organizations of states and societies have set too much value upon external and adventitious matters of wealth and descent. They will feel the gradual breath and life of regeneration all through them, and they will give permanent effect to that alone, which is of genuine worth—the achievements of the high and just human will. From that standpoint all artificial distinctions fall away, and every man is honorable, and every man is the whole of life, and the whole commonwealth. We must, however, have no violence, we must let the God of History take his own time, we must watch for the hints which He gives, and set out feeble hands to His work, and we may be sure that the end will surpass all human expectations and imaginings.

Novyrok

We are here to give our thanks to you who have been to us a friend in so many ways. The good God above, the God of History, as you finely call him, seems sometimes to us to have fallen asleep, and no doubt the work he has to do is very wearing, and he needs rest like others, who are always trying to do good, and are so often failing; yet I do not entirely agree with my friends, who find unhappiness to be the lot of the poor, and a great joy to be the lot of the rich. Each has his own sort of misery, and neither is on the road that leads to what is worth most for all. We must act for ourselves, for the days when the powers above stood ready to help have gone forever. Yet you have been a helper to us, you have not feared to speak out what was in your heart, you have taken us by the hand, and brought us out of many and severe trials. So now we are here to give our thanks for your many services to us.

Von Sendlingen

What has been done, good friends, has been too little to bring about much change in your condition for the better, and such improvement is so much to be sought.

Novyrok

(*Holding up the loving cup.*) You see this vessel. If you think that it is made of silver, you are greatly mistaken. It is covered only with a thin wash that will wear off in a very short time. It has cost very little indeed, and even then, perhaps, we have paid more for it than it is worth; but this small sum has been so divided that three hundred

workingmen have united in paying it, and express through this slight thing their feelings toward you. If it may be as they wish, the bread which you will eat in the future will be sweetened by the thought of the many to whom your life has given hope and help, and the savor that will be all through your meals will be the memory, that many and many poor and troubled workmen, at morn or noon or night, when they gather round their tables, scantily served though they be, will have in their minds, and arouse in the hearts of their wives and children, the thought that, whoever has deserted them, the angels and the sleeping God, you have ever been true and just to them.

Von Sendlingen

George, this is too much.

(Von Werner steps forward, rubs his hands, and gazes on the workingmen with immense sternness. Von Sendlingen gently puts him aside.)

Novyrok

We know very well what we shall ask for you in return for what you have done for us. A happy life and a glad heart to you and to all who are dear to you. Yet wishes are but weak, and we can do nothing in your behalf although each of us would give of his blood and breath to further you, and prayers we find receive answers only slowly. Therefore, we can but say: When you are tried, and at odds with the world, think of us and your soul will grow lighter. You will say to yourself: I have lifted these people out of their sorrow, I have borne for them as much of their burden as I could; and your eyes will grow clearer, and your sun will cast

off the clouds that threaten to overwhelm it. For I believe that this is the truest comfort that anyone can have in this poor and mistaken earth. Thanks from us all, for you are good and honorable, what you do is well done, and wrong cannot touch you. Thanks again and again.

Von Sendlingen

(*Grasping him by the hand.*) Blessings upon you and all who toil and look for the harvest that is surely coming. I receive your cup and shall always prize it among my chief possessions, and when I drink from it with my friends we shall think of you and how to help you. (*The workmen press around Von Sendlingen and shake hands with him as they pass out.*)

Von Sendlingen

Get my coat, Franz.

So, dear Franz, you are to have a short rest too. You will go tonight to your friends in the country. Well, I have told you all that is necessary; and in about ten days you return. Be sure you take every care of yourself, and think of nothing except how you are free from every obligation save the one to be good to yourself. For a few days, my dear fellow, goodbye. You have been so near to me for so many years that I never know how I can get on without you when I am away from you. Goodbye. And you too, Brigitta.

(*Shakes hands with both. The gentlemen go out.*)

Brigitta

Every one is doing his best to honor him. The great processions, the banquet, the speeches, the pre-

sentation of this picture, the letters from all over the country, show the esteem in which he is held. The good and much-suffering man.

Franz

Now there is something that I ought to know. I have been his man for over twenty years, and he talks about everything with me, in the way I like. This time, though, he says nothing. He is strange and tired. He eats nothing at all; he sits in his chair and thinks and thinks; when I speak to him, he wakes up out of a sleep, as it were. He wanders around at night. Once I saw him in the yard looking for the old door in the wall next the prison. It was past twelve o'clock and the snow was falling. I was ready for him. I thought of the time Mr. Berger brought him home half-dead and delirious. Tell me, Brigitta, what is it anyhow?

Brigitta

You are the best of men, Franz, and you will have a good time in the country. Tonight you know the Baron goes to Vienna on business after the great banquet. You have a key to the house so that you can get in when you return.

Franz

Yes, so it goes. Well, I see that I am to be left out for this time. It hurts me after long service to be treated so. I must be on my way. May all be well with him. You, too, are going away on business of your own. I shall not be here for a long time. Or are you never coming back? Goodby, Brigitta.

Brigitta

Goodby, Franz. It will be a long time before I shall see you again. Every day we have been

together for all these years, and now we are to separate. Think well of us all, dear Franz. We have understood your devotion and loved you. (*He gets as far as the door; she calls him, and takes both his hands.*) Goodby, Franz, goodby. (*Franz leaves. She seats herself. A double knock—evidently a signal previously agreed on.*) So, he has come. (*She hastens from the room, and returns in a moment with Count Henry.*)

Count Henry

Everything is prepared and in order. Some streets away I have left the carriage in an obscure place. The night is gloomy, and the tumult in the principal streets is all in our favor. How does she bear it? Has she gained strength of late?

Brigitta

She is of the nature that meets an emergency with the power of dealing with it that it calls for. She is frail, however, and, when we are far away, she will be in some danger of a relapse. I would we were already on the broad rolling ocean.

Count Henry

You will be as a mother to her, and it cannot be that after so much suffering and hardship, after such terrible atonement, the heavens will not relent and give us some hours of tranquility; but bring her to me. Let me see her and hear her speak. Is everything ready for the departure?

Brigitta

What preparations we have been able to make are over. The few belongings that we can take with us are below, where we can lay easy hands on

them. The Baron has arranged affairs so that he can excuse himself from the banquet early—he is very ill. He goes to his private room, whence he can slip away unseen, and he will be with us. No one will miss him. He returns to the banquet, and from thence to Vienna by the late train.

Count Henry

Bring her at once, Brigitta, bring her to me. (*She passes out and returns in a few moments. Victorine walks behind her slowly and gravely. She is in elegant traveling attire.*)

Brigitta

I have some last things to arrange below, and will look out besides for the Baron. All your wraps and mine, Victorine, are also there. (*Passes.*)

Count Henry

The hour has come at last when we can clasp hands, and feel that no power on earth or in heaven can sunder us again. You look grave and strange; see, I am awaking out of a slumber, as it were, that has seemed like death. Outside it is yet winter, but it will not be long before milder winds and clearing skies will call down into the earth, and the life teeming there will spring up anew to greet the increasing sunlight. For us, also, Victorine, begins a new life, a new experience, a new joy.

Victorine

I cannot yet wholly free myself from the chill and the gloom wherein I have been dwelling. I seem like one riding in the night along the verge of a viewless precipice; down below I hear the hoarse voice of the stream dashing over the rocks and steeps; behind me I perceive I know not what of danger,

eager to pluck me back into the grief and doom. I am strong, Henry, and fear can never again come near me—how should I fear after all that I have borne—but yet I would that my part in this play were well over.

Count Henry

Think of the new life that waits in a new land, under a new and warmer sun, with new friends. Once out of the shadow of these horrible walls, and far away from the misjudging people, we can clasp hands more firmly than we do now, look deeper each into the other's eyes, and see opening before us the paths of happiness.

Victorine

But the past that will haunt me, the dread in which I may have to live, the joyousness that seems a dark flower plucked from the grave, and embodying in strangeness of form and hue so many tears and sobs and sins.

Count Henry

Throw away these evil fancies and bewilderments. I shall be at your side. Oh, forgive me that I appeared even for a moment to have been led away from you. You will trust me, for every wrong you have endured I will see that a delight comes to fill up its place, for every deed which they say you have done and call strange and mysterious I will take it upon me to make requital. The woman shall not stand alone as the vain and senseless world has hitherto placed her; in the new world we begin the new life; in joyance and certitude the man beside the woman who loves him, in night and gloom the man bearing the burden with her, toiling up the

steep with her, catching from the glow that shines first in her eyes the glory re-arisen and replenishing the gladdening air and answering vault of the heavens.

Victorine

My lover and my husband!

Count Henry

We shall have joy, bliss, heaven.

Victorine

No, we shall have calm, duty, forgiveness. Our bond is not wholly like that of others; at least not until the benediction of a nobler inner life, and generous deeds to all mankind, comes to us with its healing out of the skies. We are to be to each other guides to strength and purity, we must not ask that our steps shall be along walks bordered with flowers, we must not demand that the air shall be filled with perfumes for our delight; our meat and drink shall be patience and unwearied well-doing; it shall be ours to hunt out the oppressed and misguided, to bring solace where the day wears no smile, to join our small power to the force which is making man the image and the vessel of the all-renovating love. Oh we shall not ask for joy nor ecstasy, but for whatever comes with the fact that our hearts are pure and that our hands are held forth to all who may need them.

Count Henry

I shall be most myself when I am with you in the doing of any act, however small, that is permeated with this spirit which is your inmost heart and hope. (*Folds her in his arms. The bell rings twice sharply and distinctly.*)

Brigitta

(*Entering.*) He has returned. (*Exit and in a moment Von Sendlingen appears with her.*)

Von Sendlingen

You are together at last. (*Takes Count Henry by the hand, and then embraces Victorine.*) I have you only for so short a time, my daughter; I deserved better of the world. I should have had the happiness of bringing you up, of treasuring your early laughter; and your quaint baby fears; and now that you have come to me through so much sorrow, I must give you up; but you will think of me always, and well.

Victorine

Dear father, it cannot be long before you will be with us?

Von Sendlingen

I hope not, child. I shall resign that new post. I want no more honors and dignities. I want only rest and forgiveness. But time hastens—

Count Henry

Do not allow yourself to be troubled for us, father, my own precautions have been adequate. We shall be rich in that far land, that noble land in the southern seas.

Von Sendlingen

And you, Brigitta, you shall not suffer for the great sacrifice which you make for mine and me. Good Brigitta, it is hard to leave behind all the associations which must be so much to you, and I can never thank you enough. You have been a noble friend to us all. Be assured that no harm can come to you for what you are doing, and if our best

love and care can repay you, they shall be yours in stintless abundance.

Brigitta

I ask for nothing. I have tried to do what I thought right. I feel calm and strong, and the future does not trouble me.

Von Sendlingen

And you, Count Henry, can I trust my child to you?

Count Henry

I will care for her as I do for my own soul.

Von Sendlingen

See, I have this ring. It was given to me by your mother, Victorine. It shall be a symbol of union between you, it shall forever heal the breach which has brought such sorrow and disaster into so many lives. (*He gives it to Count Henry, who in his turn places it on Victorine's finger. They stand with clasped hands.*) You have been sorely tried, but may the years bring to you that true enjoyment which comes from deep-hearted allegiance to the right, to man, and to God. So all is done. And now we have small time for parting words. Good-by, Brigitta, best and truest of friends. (*They shake hands. Brigitta bursts into tears and goes out.*) My son, you have shown yourself a man, whose like I see not anywhere. Be strong in the future as in the past. My Victorine, I shall hear from you soon. There, do not weep. These eyes have shed too many tears already. I can hardly bear to let you go, but it must be. I shall hear from you soon. There, take her, Henry. One more embrace. God protect both of you, farewell, farewell.

(They pass out, and after a short pause the shutting of the door is heard. He falls into a chair. The rest is in the manner of a person speaking to himself in a half delirium.) That is over. My heart hurts terribly. Great God, what is this strange feeling that comes over me now? *(He sinks back half-fainting.)* No, I must arouse myself, or all will be lost. So, I am getting better, I feel relieved. *(Stands with some difficulty.)* I will not fail now, I must return to the banquet. *(Masters himself with great effort.)* Now I can go. *(Pauses before the portrait.)* The perfect Judge—what am I now? I shall atone, I shall atone. They shall remember not what I am, but what I was, what I ought to be! *(He prepares to put out the lights. The cries are heard again: "Long live the just Judge! The perfect Judge." He trembles and shrinks together with agony.)*

The Curtain Falls

ACT IV

SCENE.—Library of Von Sendlingen. He comes in a dressing gown, and seats himself. He looks very ill, feeble and old. Two weeks have elapsed.

Franz

(Enters and places a letter on the table.)

Do you need me?

Von Sendlingen

(Tearing open the envelope and reading ravenously.) No, not at present. *(A knock. Franz passes out. Berger enters.)*

Berger

You are stronger today, Victor, I see it in your eyes.

Von Sendlingen

No, you are mistaken; I shall never be any better. Pray hand me that taper. Now light it for me. So, that is well. *(He holds the letter in the flame, and watches it consume with eager eyes. Berger looks upon him with inexpressible wonder and grief.)*

Berger

You appear very anxious to dispose of that trifle.

Von Sendlingen

The papers accumulate so. I have been burning letters and dispatches ever since I returned. What a rubbish heap the past builds up around us! Every once in awhile we must take an account of stock, and dispose of the refuse in some way. This letter

tells me only that all is well, that a work in which I have been engaged has succeeded, that the wrong will be undone, that those who need it will be made happy at last.

Berger

Will you not learn to let the dead past bury its dead? And yet it confronts us just now with more than its usual vigor. Has any information arrived? Is there any light on the unaccountable disappearance?

Von Sendlingen

She has vanished as though she had never been. I am left all alone again, even my agony does not find it desirable to house with me. I am strangely free from pain or anxiety. But I shall pass soon, and I am not eager to linger much longer.

Berger

Tut, tut! You expect Von Werner this morning? He is wild with grief, such as he can feel, over the inauspicious opening of his term of office.

Von Sendlingen

Yes, he ought to be here now. I am sorry for him. The strange man, whose limitations are so apparent, and who in so much is but a half-developed child. I should expect him to wail and even tear his hair, but he will not suffer much longer, and it is to be hoped that he will through this untoward matter gain a little wisdom, which will be all the better for others and for him.

Berger

Victor, you terrify me. I am torn by doubts and agitations that I dare not express even to myself. Victor, if the ordeal through which you have been has—

Von Sendlingen

No, George, be seated again, and do not peer into the outer darkness which only a few ghosts of reflected lamplight illumine. If ever man had a friend, true, tried, loving, sacrificing, I have had him in you. Trust me to the end, it will not be long. (*A knock, Von Werner enters. He looks forlorn and amazed. He maintains his extravagant manner with difficulty; every now and then he breaks down and almost whimpers, then recovers himself suddenly, and gazes about to see if anyone has observed him.*) Ah, Von Werner, you are come just in the nick of time; Berger is here. The presence of both of you is especially welcome this morning; but where is Dernegg?

Von Werner

Important business took him away from the city. (*Pauses and stares.*) I hope you are able to stand the rigor of an interview? (*Whimpers.*)

Von Sendlingen

Vienna does not agree with us old fellows any more. Time was when we could hold our own with anybody, but it is past.

Berger

We shall see you Minister of Justice yet.

Von Werner

(*With a terrified solemnity.*) You are aware that the great official has arrived, and that he will be here shortly to make some interrogatories, are you not?

Von Sendlingen

The sooner, the better.

THE JUDGE

Von Werner

(*Stands up as if he would like to go.*) A postponement to the afternoon is possible, if you will be stronger then.

Von Sendlingen

No, we will get to the end this morning.

Berger

I should advise this course.

Von Werner

(*Rises and strides about, groans and almost weeps.*) Thanks, thanks. It is a terrible misfortune with which I assume the office so honored by you. What can I do about it? You will stand by me, and keep any and every reflection from my good name? What could I do about the escape? (*Lays hand on Von Sendlingen.*)

Von Sendlingen

Nothing, my good friend; console yourself; who could for a moment blame you? It will all be made plain in due time, be patient. (*A knock. Franz ushers in the Minister of Justice. The Minister seats himself.*)

Minister

It is a most calamitous circumstance which comes under my observation here. Have you any explanations to offer?

Von Werner

(*Eagerly and with sudden and ludicrous assumption of his old manner.*) None. The whole affair verges on the miraculous. The doors seem to have been opened from within, they were locked again after the fugitive had released herself, and the final flight must have been taken through a small postern

in an inner wall. She could hence easily reach the street, and this house was wholly deserted on that night, it being the occasion of a banquet to the Baron. It is a riddle to which no answer is forthcoming.

Minister

Have the necessary precautions been taken to secure the prisoner in case of her discovery?

Von Werner

(With increasing vigor and many gestures.) All that is possible has been done, but she is lost to view as if she had never been. This beginning of my incumbency is a terribly disastrous one.

Minister

One cannot discover any failure on your part. There is no reason for the overestimating of this shadow so far as you are concerned. A properly exonerating statement can be made public officially.

Von Werner

Thanks, thanks. *(Shakes hands with the minister. Gazes about triumphantly.)*

Minister

(To Von Sendlingen.) You seem to be in a very disturbed condition of health?

Von Sendlingen

I do not believe that it will much longer be a question of health with me.

Minister

A short rest and a sojourn in a warmer climate will bring you around. We have too much need of you to be willing to think otherwise.

Von Sendlingen

You may, perhaps, change your views when you hear what I shall take this opportunity of saying to you.

Minister

Leave it to some better time, you are now too much agitated.

Von Sendlingen

It must come now, or not at all.

Minister

Proceed, then.

Berger

This is the atonement, the expiation. I understand it all.

Von Sendlingen

I shall come to the heart of my communication at once. I do not wish that this upright and honorable man (*to Von Werner who nods and bows and smiles vacantly*) should know another moment of anxiety. It is of Victorine Lippert and her mysterious disappearance that I wish to speak.

Von Werner

(*With excitement, stands and crosses his hands on his breast.*) I always felt that you would do for me all that lay in your power.

Minister

Proceed. There may be other things of equal consequence with your vindication. Von Werner. (*Von Werner subsides rapidly.*)

Von Sendlingen

In the first place I must state that the unhappy girl was my own daughter, and that her release from prison was effected by me. I sent her away in the care of my housekeeper, Brigitta.

All

Your daughter, you set her free, you obtained her release—the jailer! the jailer!

Von Sendlingen

No, no, the jailer is as innocent as any one of you. I was the only one who effected this crime. I am at your disposal. I await the consequences of my confession.

Minister

You are not well, you are mad!

Von Sendlingen

No I am clearer in my intelligence than ever I was. I see with the unclouded sense of a dying man. I am a criminal and I deliver myself up to justice.

Berger

Victor I am here at your side. You bewilder me, but I shall always be near you in your time of trial.

Von Sendlingen

Best of friends!

Minister

That girl your daughter!

Von Sendlingen

My daughter. The story is a long one, and cannot now be told. It may be hereafter.

Minister

But why resort to these desperate means? Were no others at hand?

Von Sendlingen

None. She was condemned to die. It was a judicial murder. She was innocent of the crime charged to her.

Von Werner

The judges were nearly unanimous. The higher

court affirmed the decision. The evidence against her was conclusive.

Minister

You did not preside at the trial?

Von Sendlingen

It was a conflict between my sense of right and love of my child, intensified by knowledge of her great misfortune. I suppressed my love for her with what strength lay in me, and allowed my feeling of obligation to the law to gain the victory. She was condemned on evidence that I shall be able to show was inconclusive. The chief testimony in her favor was thrown out on purely technical grounds. She is innocent. The thought came to me: Against this wrong only another wrong can bring to pass the right.

Minister

A fearful dilemma.

Von Sendlingen

Even so. Yet I came to this conclusion only as the last resort of desperation. She was condemned. I could free her only by committing a crime. I revolted therefrom. My whole life was arraigned against me. Then came to me the awful conflict. Should she die or I? Should she pass out of the world a criminal or I? The verdict was not alone pronounced upon her, it was pronounced upon me. Had I the strength to take this criminality upon myself? I shuddered upon this verge for a long time, but I felt that, when the limitations put upon a man by destiny were too great for him to bear, he had the right to free himself by any way whatsoever. I exercised this right, gave life to her, and surrender myself to the law.

Minister

Why were these facts not brought to me before in time to prevent all this?

Von Sendlingen

My affiliations with the working people had, as you will remember, put me out of favor with yourself.

Minister

But the emperor—a personal appeal to him?

Von Sendlingen

The attack upon his life and his long illness frustrated that, just as I had reached Vienna for that very end.

Minister

What a tragedy!

Von Sendlingen

I am in your hands.

Minister

The case demands the deepest consideration. The struggle between the love of a father for his child, and that reverence for the law which seems to be the inmost principle of your nature, must have been a most severe one.

Von Werner

I must beg that I shall be wholly left out of the necessity of any dealing with the case. I am utterly broken down with the mere recital, and old friendship would make me powerless to manage it. (*Stares around and mutters incoherently.*)

Berger

I shall take the Baron's defense in hand at once.

Von Sendlingen

I do not desire any defense, I absolutely refuse all defense. My act in the eyes of the law is wholly

indefensible, whatever it may be before that higher law which so imperfectly and inadequately expresses itself in any human institutions. I can only be punished, and for punishment I place myself at the disposal of the authorities. Between my child's judicial murder, and my own disgrace, I choose the latter.

Minister

No so simple a settlement is possible. Innumerable considerations have been left out of your view. In the passion of the moment, and in the heat of your action, you could see but a little way before you. For the present you must remain here in your own rooms, but under the supervision of the new judge. Your word of honor not to transgress this regulation is needful.

Von Sendlingen

I give it.

Von Werner

(*With staring eyes and real horror.*) I beg you, I entreat you, leave me out of this strange affair.

Minister

How can you expect to be left out? Was not the girl convicted by you?

Von Werner

(*His artificial manner collapses gradually and visibly. The veneer rubs off. He is terribly excited, and his voice breaks into strange cadences. Many gestures.*) My brain is in a whirl. I have always clung to the closest interpretation of the law, and, if I have been wrong in this most important case of my life, I feel that it will take me some time to fathom the thoughts that are storming within me.

Minister

I shall at once make a complete re-investigation. I shall go over the evidence and the whole procedure, and should my conclusions coincide with yours, Von Sendlingen, an interview with the Emperor will soon lead you out of this labyrinth. The further pursuit of the young woman will cease for the present, let this be managed judiciously, inasmuch as she can doubtless be produced if we shall have any need of her. I shall wish to confer with you, Berger.

Berger

As you please.

Von Sendlingen

I am entirely at a loss. I do not apprehend. I can allow no infringement of the law.

Minister

All shall be duly arranged with every regard to the proper interpretation of all legal provisions.

Von Sendlingen

I am not then permitted to make that recompense which my crime demands? I am peradventure to be granted an immunity which a lesser criminal would not have received? Which was indeed denied to my daughter?

Von Werner

(*Wringing his hands.*) It is I who am now on the rack.

Minister

What would you have?

Von Sendlingen

The public disgrace and condemnation which I deserve.

Minister

That must be left with me.

Von Sendlingen

You can only decide as I have decided.

Minister

No, I must decide very differently. In the present disturbed state of the public mind, the disclosure of these affairs would be simply ruinous. The very government itself is in danger. The wildness of revolution might be upon us. You have not chosen an ill time for your demonstration of the existence of a law beyond the law.

Von Sendlingen

You go too far. I demand the unsaying of that last.

Minister

As you wish; but the successful composition of your difficulties shall be my affair. I am not a father distracted with grief over a host of disasters and strange eventualities. I am free from passion and desperation. I am not fettered by a slavish reading of the law. I shall know how to be truly, really just. Moreover, the welfare of the commonwealth is paramount, patriotic attachment to the land higher than all; the impeachment of one among our foremost judges would be to play with an outburst of destructive forces; so soon upon his elevation to a higher position, so upon the heels of the attempt against the life of the sovereign; to the state we must sacrifice all, our wealth, our souls, our lives, our deepest rectitude, our very belief in justice.

Von Sendlingen

I shall refuse all such tampering with the fate

which I call my own. I shall make the expiation which is right and due. I cannot live without making it. My life would be a hell of the most savage remorse unless I am given this privilege.

Minister

Let some time intervene before you fully make up your mind.

Von Sendlingen

No, I am aware of what that means. I am put to the last and bitterest trial. Even the right to atone is taken away from me. The law appears most lawless at its very source and fountain. Thus is it that the whole life of the time is directed toward death and ruin. Thus is it that my child is involved in miseries unspeakable, they are not hers, they come from the diseased commonwealth. I too am drawn into the whirlpool. Some day let us hope that misfortunes like my child's will be impossible, and disasters like mine cannot occur. I shall therefore be my own judge and executioner. *(He takes a phial from his pocket and attempts to place it to his lips.)*

Berger

What madness is this, Victor?

Von Werner

God have mercy upon me!

Minister

Seize his arm there. *(The struggle is brief, the bottle drops to the floor. Von Sendlingen falls back in his chair, white and overcome. He looks like a dying man. A knock. Franz enters.)*

Franz

The Countess Riesner desires to see the Minister.

Minister

I can see no one.

Von Sendlingen

(*Arousing.*) Let her come. Is Marianna Brandes with her?

Franz

She is. (*Steps to Von Sendlingen.*) Can I do anything for you? You are fearfully ill.

Von Sendlingen

No, not now. I beg of you, let the ladies come in. I am strong again. It is important, I assure you.

Minister

Admit them then.

Franz

It will not last long. I will remain near. He is dying. I see it clearly. Something has been killing him. If they would only go and leave him to me. (*Exit. After an interval enter the Countess and Marianna. The ladies seat themselves.*)

Minister

To what are we indebted for the honor of this visit, madame?

Countess

I come especially to see you. I heard a few days ago that you were expected.

Minister

I hope that I may be of service.

Countess

My son, Count Henry, who has for some time been giving me the greatest cause for sorrow, has disappeared. For two weeks no trace of him is to be discovered.

Minister

I do not altogether see how I can be of any use to you in those premises.

Countess

The woman, Victorine Lippert, convicted of a heinous crime, has through some unlooked-for favoritism, succeeded in escaping from her prison. I have at last, after a long struggle, succumbed to the conviction that he has somewhere met her and accompanied her flight.

Minister

I remember now, he was the man involved.

Von Sendlingen

From information received by me and equally trustworthy with that of the Countess I can say that the Count is now the husband of Victorine Lippert.

Countess

I feared as much. Unheard of misfortune! Forgetting his rank, his rights, he has allied himself to that false and designing murderess.

Marianna Brandes

Do not forget, madame, that to the best, trials must come. Lean on a strength superior to your own.

Von Werner

I am to blame for much of this. I begin to see what a terrible error I am in. I must undertake the work of my life all over again. (*Breaks into hoarse noises like sobs.*)

Berger

Summa lex, summa injuria. The extremity of the law is the extremity of injury. The freer and larger interpretation is forever the safer.

THE JUDGE

Countess

But he must be found, he must be brought back, he must not be made to pay with his whole life for a youthful folly, an unimportant event in the career of a man of the world. He cannot remain permanently attached to that vulgar girl. I implore the aid of every one of you. Let her be brought to justice, and my son, after a period of travel, can resume the place which is his of right.

Marianna Brandes

The saints and heavenly powers will grant it.

Von Sendlingen

That may not be so easy as you suppose. The chief witness, however, against Victorine is here again. A brief interrogation is possible and really necessary under the eye of the Minister. Can it not be undertaken?

Countess

I protest most earnestly. To what end? And for what purpose? The whole action is now closed. Poor child! Marianna has had enough of it, and so free from blame and mixture with the affair as she is.

Marianna Brandes

I am at the disposal of a strength that is greater than my own. I am made to be the instrument of powers larger than myself. I am content. Meekly and humbly will I take up my burden and bear it. I am thus disciplined and built into the life that I most wish to be.

Minister

The suggestion is a noteworthy one, and I see no reason for failing to take it. You will tell the

truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Berger will be as generous in his questions as he can be.

Countess

I do not think this should go any further. I protest against it again. Marianna, you need not speak.

Minister

She will speak. Berger, proceed.

Berger

Did you overhear a conversation between the Count and Victorine Lippert?

Marianna Brandes

Good saints in heaven, do you mean to call me an eavesdropper?

Berger

Answer the question.

Marianna Brandes

I was behind a curtain, it was purely by an accident, they came into the room after I did.

Berger

Answer the question.

Marianna Brandes

I was behind a curtain, it was purely by an accident, they came into the room after I did.

Berger

Could you hear what they said?

Marianna Brandes

They spoke indistinctly; I heard,—I heard something.

Berger

Did you hear anything about a marriage?

Marianna Brandes

The Count did say that he would marry—how can I remember?—it was very dark,—but it was about a marriage with Victorine.

Countess

It is not so, and even if it were, it is immaterial. My son could make no promises that were binding to such a girl.

Berger

Did you hear anything more?

Marianna Brandes

I moved just then. Oh, look down upon me, protecting spirits!—the Count came towards me, and I left the room—

Berger

Hastily?

Marianna Brandes

Yes, hastily, quite so.

Berger

What sort of a night was it when Victorine left the house?

Marianna Brandes

Very stormy. I preferred to be indoors.

Berger

Did she go willingly?

Marianna Brandes

I should have preferred remaining in the house; she was forced to go.

Berger

You saw her the following morning.

Marianna Brandes

Yes, the village woman was there first.

Berger

Did you see any marks of violence on the child?

Marianna Brandes

I did not dare to take it up. I—I—am not certain. The village woman held it.

Countess

I will listen no further. This is an outrage upon me and mine. I will appeal to higher authority.

Minister

Do not hasten away yet. We are not entirely through.

Berger

Where is the village woman now? She could not be found at the time of the trial.

Marianna Brandes

In America.

Berger

How did she obtain the means for the journey?

Marianna Brandes

That I do not know.

Berger

I believe that I am through.

Von Sendlingen

(*To Berger.*) You were never more a friend to me than now.

Von Werner

(*In dull and husky tones.*) Why did I not see through all this before?

Countess

All this signifies nothing to my son or to me. This woman is condemned and has been allowed to escape. She must be brought back and my son freed from her.

Minister

So be it then. I will take the needed measures, but first you must bear in mind one thing.

Countess

What may that be?

Minister

I do not doubt that the abiding place of Victorine Lippert, or I mistake, Victorine Riesner, can be readily found. There is no government but will extradite under the circumstances; with her, however, will return your son—to be arraigned on the double charge of deceiving her, and then assisting her, a condemned criminal, to escape. Do you wish me to speak to the servant?

Countess

(*After a pause.*) I must ask you to excuse me, I am a broken hearted woman and mother, remember to act for me and for him.

Minister

We shall forget neither, madame.

Countess

Come with me, Marianna.

Marianna

I beg you will forgive me. I shall go to my brother's. I do not believe that my further stay in your house would be desirable. I shall send for my few things, and ask for my dismissal. The angels of the highest heaven keep you in charge, dear Countess.

Countess

This last pin-prick adds very little to my pain. Good morning, gentlemen. (*She leaves with calm dignity.*)

Marianna Brandes

You do not wish anything more from me?

Minister

No, you may go to your brother's. It is, however, only by a sad combination of circumstances that you are not dealt with very differently.

Marianna Brandes

The guardianship that has always had me in its especial care has not deserted me now. (*She passes out rapidly.*)

Von Werner

I am chagrined, dismayed, overwhelmed. I present my resignation. (*Breaks down completely.*)

Minister

No, you are the better judge for all you have heard and felt today, you will remain. Von Sendlingen—

Von Sendlingen

They have taken from me everything. They will find those wretched ones, and bring them back. I shall have failed totally, utterly.

Minister

No, you cannot think us so inhumanly cruel. Bestir yourself, take heart, all shall be well.

Von Sendlingen

But I shall be allowed to take my guilt upon myself finally?

Minister

That remains for further consideration.

Von Sendlingen

No, it must be, it shall be, I demand it as my right, I will have it so, I will proclaim it everywhere.

Minister

You wish me to proceed to extremities?

Von Sendlingen

Do your worst. I—I—. (*He screams and falls back in his chair.*) Franz—George—(*Franz rushes in.*)

Berger

Franz, I am afraid that there is nothing more that we can do. He is dying.

Franz

(*Falls at Van Sendlingen's knee.*) I have been looking for it all the time. What have they done to you? What can I do?

Von Sendlingen

Nothing at all. It is indeed the end, I did not think it would be so soon. After all, no man can do more. I die for them and the right, but the terrible cloud is lifted, the bondage in which three generations have been held is broken, they are free again.

Minister

Yes, they are free again.

Von Sendlingen

I can die content, then. I am not wholly dishonored, I thought it would be otherwise, but no doubt this is best. You will look after everything, George. All is prepared for them, and for you, Franz. So it is over—good night—goodby. (*He dies.*)

Franz

My master!

Von Werner

I shall begin my life anew, illumined by the light of this sacrifice.

Berger

Good friend, good Judge, farewell. This was a man, and heaven is more heaven because he enters it.

Minister

Truth is not less truth, and justice is not less justice, because mercy and love shine through them with a radiance that is divine.

The Curtain Falls

THE END



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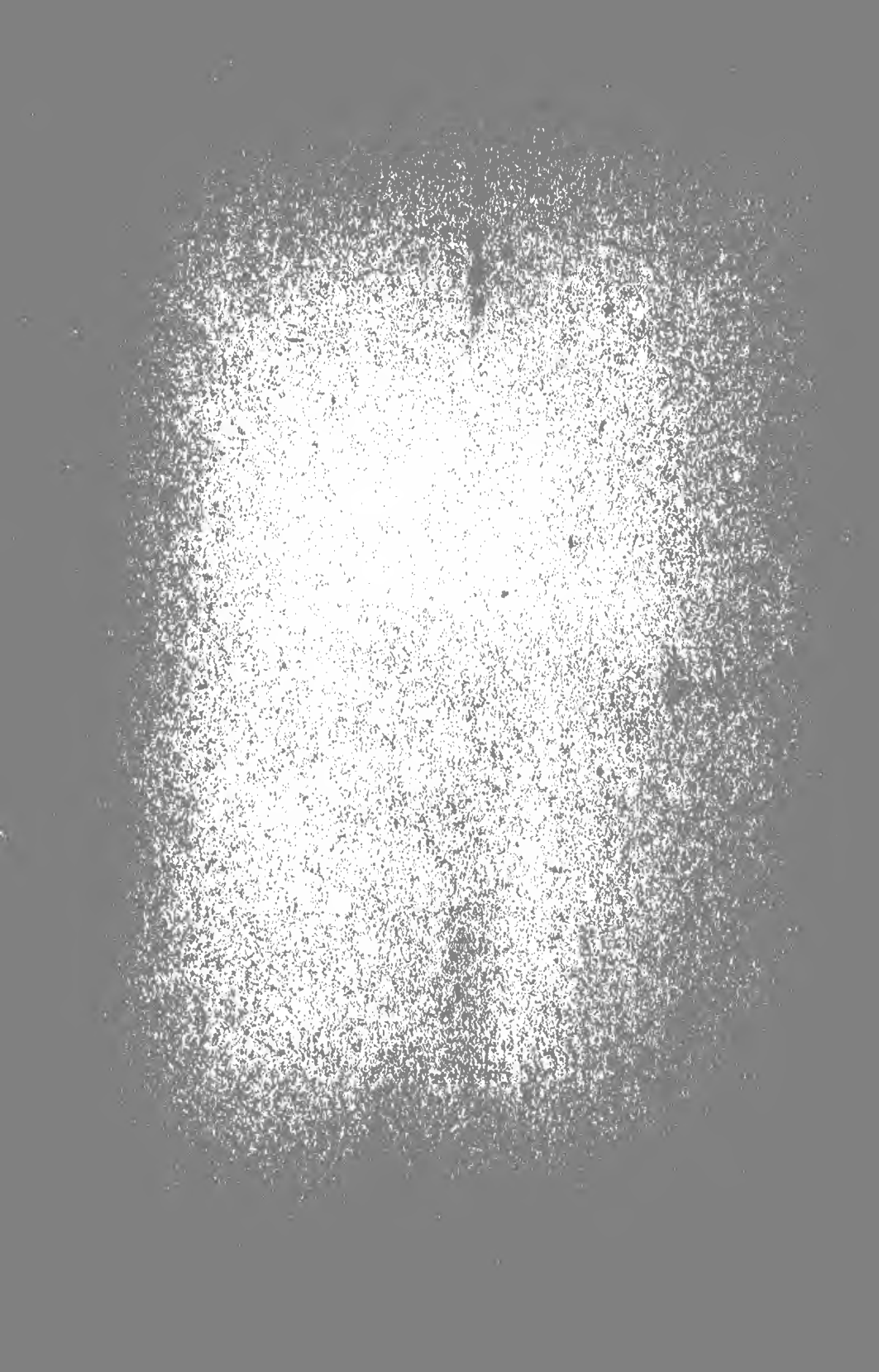
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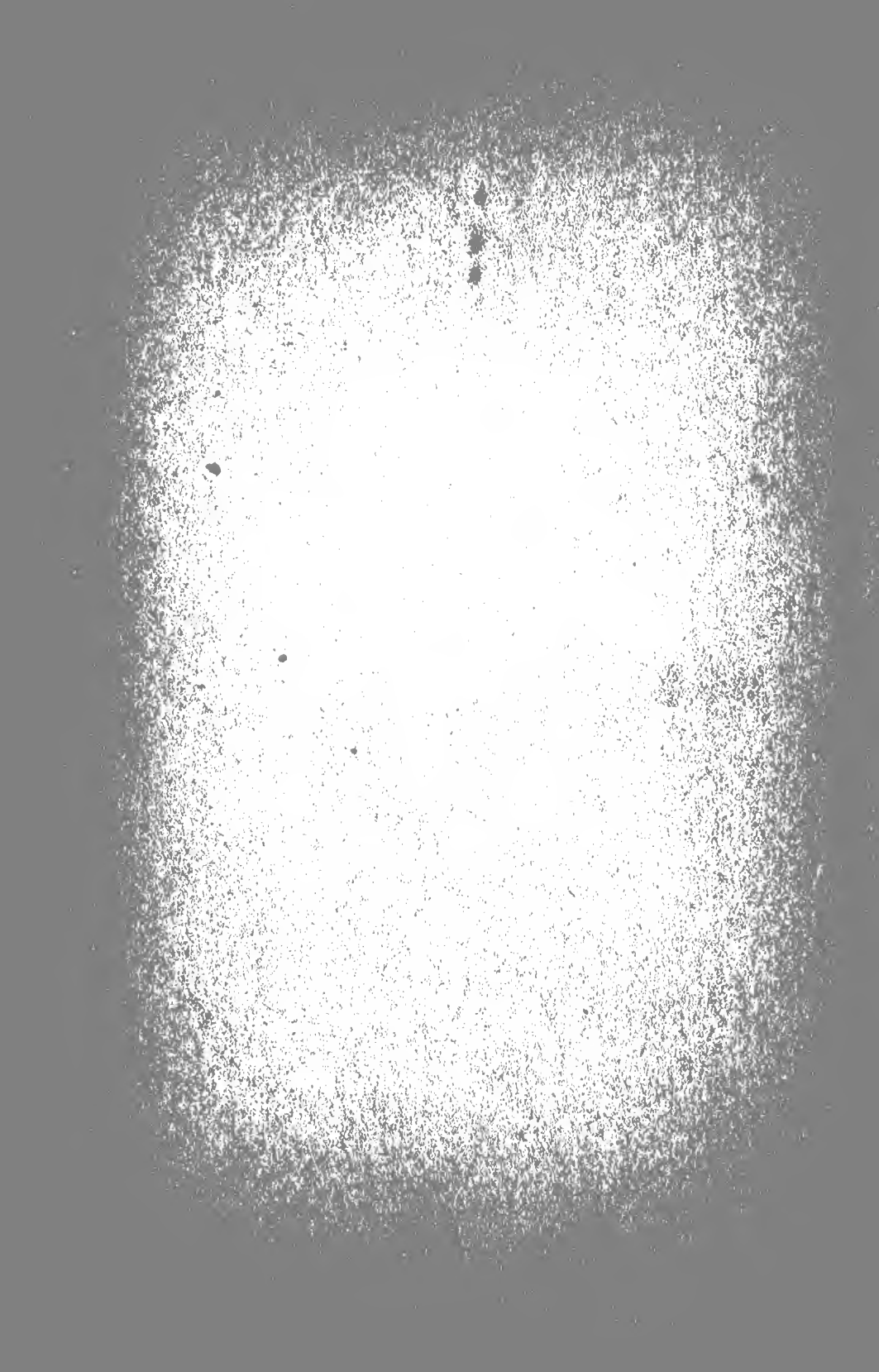


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